CURRICULUM RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN MEXICO

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After taking into account the literature about research and curriculum development in Mexico, the author presents a survey vision on the main trends and subjects related to this question. She also sets out some of the models that had as purpose to innovate curriculum from different perspectives: the managerial way of thinking (competence-based design, curriculum flexibility, strategic planning); the constructivist and experience-based perspectives; and the incorporation of transversal or cross subject matters in order to meet the need to strengthen the ethical aspect of curriculum and to promote, on one hand, human development and, on the other, civic and environmental education. After this, the author compares the situation of curriculum research in Mexico with the results that can be found in similar studies carried out in other countries. What can be observed is a huge expansion and an increasing interest in curriculum development, but at the same time a great diversity of approaches and interests, since some tensions and contradictions can be found between the different actors within the context of educational policies and the ruling assessment and certification systems.

Introduction

First of all, I would like to thank Dr. William Pinar for his invitation to present today in front of such an interested audience these reflections about research and curriculum development in Mexico. I would like to offer here a general outlook that will make possible for the audience to understand comprehensively the main tendencies and guidelines that rule in research and intervention.

This is not the purpose of this participation to offer a comprehensive abstract of all the contributions made in Mexico about curriculum, but I will start offering a general outlook of what has been published about curriculum during the last decade, comparing with the production of the eighties. I will base this retrospective outlook on two different states of affairs about Mexican curriculum research (A. Díaz Barriga *et al.*, 1995; 2003) and on different studies and papers that deal with the same subject. Afterwards, I will focus on curriculum development. I took this decision for two main reasons: first, because curriculum development was one of the principal interests for the

education institutions during the nineties and crystallized in important curriculum reforms that were implemented in almost all the levels of the Mexican education system; in the second place, since it seems to be tightly linked to diverse interests and national, international or global educational policies which determine the direction of the decision-taking in education in general terms and in particular the definition of questions related to curriculum and teaching. I actually believe that a retrospective view on the situation of curriculum development is important because it helps us to identify the models that seek to introduce educational innovations and to understand the problems faced by educational institutions and their actors within the complex process of defining curriculum and put it into practice.

Afterwards, I will make some comments about the situation of curriculum research and intervention in Mexico, comparing it with what other researchers have found in other countries, particularly with a study carried out by the European Community about curriculum reforms in the nineties (Eurydice, 2000); I will also highlight coincident aspects with some of the studies included by William Pinar in his *International Handbook of Curriculum Research*.

This exposition is based on the following premises:

1. The domain of curriculum studies is one of the most important in Mexico in relation with education, not only because of the huge literature that it produces, but also because curriculum is still nowadays the intellectual and organizational focus of the educational processes within the teaching institutions, the ground in which purposes, contents and processes are defined and discussed and, finally, the space where groups and actors contend for the power.

2. It is important to take into account the polysemy and diversity of the concepts that can be found nowadays to denote curriculum and curriculum research. This is why, like in other countries, we can not speak of "one" or even less "THE Mexican view" about curriculum, but of a diversity of views. Of course those opinions are not precisely uniform and they often lead to tensions and even contradictions.

3. Amongst the main tensions that can be identified as a result of the social and economic dynamics of the last two decades we find what can be called split or divergent agenda configuration between curriculum researchers, interested in

theoretical deliberation and the historicization and comprehensive understanding of the curriculum processes on the emic level, versus the manifest interests shown by the educational institutions management teams, who focus on meeting efficiently the practical problems faced by the institutions, since the possibilities to obtain funding and to achieve their programs' accreditation depends more and more on their effectiveness. This is also related with another important tension, which can be observed between local, national and global outlooks on curriculum matters.
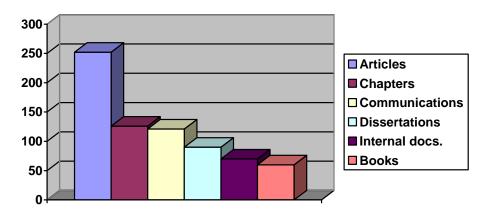
4. Although the globalization discourse can be found allover within the field of curriculum research, the studies about curriculum that are carried out in Mexico have both a very local and national nature. And even when those studies do not find a solution to them, they usually tackle social problems and demands of the country and the whole Latin American region. Therefore we believe that the curriculum researchers' main commitments have to do with subjects such as inequality in educational quality and supply, the massification of teaching, the marked deficiencies in the training of basic and middle education students, the obsolescence and rigidity of the study plans and of the teaching models, the incapacity of educational institutions to meet the demands of an uncertain and depressed labor market, the teaching staff's lack of professionalization or the disregard of the educational practices that are actually implemented within the classroom context as a result of the curriculum reforms (F. Díaz Barriga, 2003).
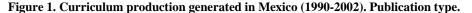
Curriculum production in Mexico

This effort to shape states of affair about educational research, including amongst a wide range of subjects curriculum research, has been promoted by the Mexican Council for Educational Research (Consejo Nacional de Investigación Educativa, COMIE). This organization draws together a multidisciplinary group of researchers who come from different universities and research centers spread about al over the country. Every ten years, one of those researchers' task is to study the literature produced in a specific field of educational research, gathering and analyzing what has been published in one decade, mainly individual books, compilations and articles that come out in scientific reviews and periodicals specialized in education, but they also take into account doctoral dissertations, communications presented in the main academic congresses on the national level and official information when we can have access to it. Personally, I have

participated as a researcher in the states of affairs carried out in the eighties and nineties, as a member of the team coordinated by Ángel Díaz Barriga (1995; 2003), dealing precisely with the subject of tendencies in curriculum development (Díaz Barriga and Lugo, 2003).

During the nineties we can observe that curriculum production has tripled in comparison with the previous decade, since we were able to create a database made up of 719 documents produced and published during the 1990-2002, three times more than the 235 documents that had been gathered for the eighties. Obviously the greater systematization of the computer databases helped to improve the access to information for this last period, but if we consider that the articles in arbitrated reviews increased from 180 to 252 between the eighties and the nineties, books from 24 to 60 and that 126 chapters were published in compilations, the growth of the field can not be denied. A brief inventory of the publication type generated during the nineties show that 35.04% were articles in periodicals (252), 17.52% were chapters in compilation books (126), 16.82% were communications in congresses (121), 12.51% doctoral dissertations (90), 9.73% institutional internal documents (70) and 8.34% individual books (60) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Curriculum production generated in Mexico (1990-2002). Publication type.

But I think that the most important aspect of our retrospective outlook for this paper is the classification according to topic that we were able to carry out within curriculum production. We were able to define the following topics:

• *Conceptualization of the curriculum sphere*: How curriculum and related concepts are seen from different theoretical, disciplinary or epistemological approaches (*e. g.* from knowledge theory, psychology, sociology, etc.). This category includes works in which

the author(s) offer theories or principles about curriculum, carry out analyses that compare curriculum approaches, reexamine historical or philosophical questions, discuss the underlying perspectives about didactics, learning, education or society, always with regard to curriculum.
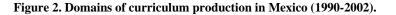
• *Curriculum development*: Tries to identify the main trends and models which oriented the design and operation of curriculum projects during the nineties. This category includes questions related to planning, selection and organization of curriculum contents, the generation and implementation of innovating projects for the process of drawing up study plans and programs.
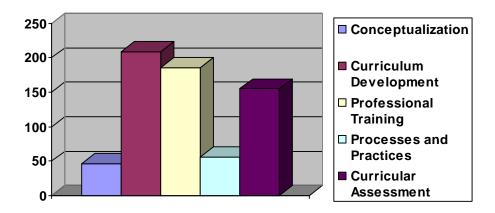
• *Curriculum processes and practices*: Reviews the production that recounts the diversity of processes (affective, cognitive, ideological, intersubjective processes; also processes of social interaction and identity construction) which take place within the classroom or the educational institution and are directly connected to curriculum.

• *Curriculum and professional training*: Gathers proposals and studies about how the training of university professionals has been conceived, about sociological studies related to professions and the monitoring or follow up of graduated students from the curricular perspective.

• *Curricular assessment*: Analyzes the main trends, proposals and approaches related to assessment that are implemented in the curriculum field. Includes not only curriculum assessment (*i. e.*, assessment of its development, formal structure, operation as educational project), but also the assessment within curriculum (of diverse curriculum processes and practices, of the actors themselves in relation with curriculum).

Considering the topic, we analize in depth just 652 documents. In decreasing order, the data are the following: 29% (209) are related to the subject of curriculum development; 25.8% (186) have to do with professional training; 22% (155) with curricular assessment, whereas 8% (56) are studies about curriculum processes and practices and only 6.39% (46) are dealing with conceptualization or theorization about curriculum (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Domains of curriculum production in Mexico (1990-2002).

If we take into account that a quarter of the published studies has to do with the generation of curriculum proposals and models (183 out of 719, *i. e*. 25%) and, on the other hand, if we combine with these the works that focus on subjects traditionnaly related to the institutional needs of defining the whys and wherefores about curriculum (curriculum development, professional training and assessment), we can put into this category almost 85% of the Mexican literature about curriculum during the nineties.

The first conclusion we can draw from these data is that during the last decade (the same way as during the previous decade, the eighties) is that there was *a noticeable interest in studies that focused on the educational intervention and on the generation of proposals, on the implementation and on finding solutions to specific problems*, leaving behind the basic interest in the conceptual construction of the curriculum field, in its historical revival or in the explanation of educational, instruction or identity processes *per se*. Ángel Díaz Barriga (2001) already asserted that studies on curriculum development in Mexico usually have a bearing on two main aspects: applied research, which has as purpose to analyze the effects of different programs and methodologies and, on the other hand, that kind of research that suggests to systematize the reflection on curricular experiences.

However, although the previous statement goes in the same direction as the main tendency that we identified in the curriculum studies we analyzed (at least in quantitative terms), this does not mean that the field is characterized by a unique or hegemonic approach able to comprehend all the possible study objects, problems or situations that could be interesting for the subject. In the 1982-1992 state of knowledge we already identified diverse meanings for the term "curriculum", which to a great extent keep appearing or get a new sense: a) study plans and programs as products and

formal curriculum structures; b) teaching, learning and instruction processes; c) hidden curriculum and daily life within the classroom; d) training of professionals and social function of professions; e) social and educational practice; f) selection, organization and distribution problems of curriculum contents; g) subjective interpretation of the participating subjects on curriculum (Á. Díaz Barriga *et al.*, 1995: 31). This conceptual diversity has led not only to the term's polysemy, but also to a certain blur in the outlines of curriculum research with regard to the other areas of educational research, like the study of teaching-learning processes, specific didactics, sociological studies about professions, intersubjectivity, educational interaction processes or even gender and multicultural studies, to quote only a few of them.

This reflection agrees with Pinar's idea (2004: 185-186) that the meaning of curriculum can not be reduced to its literal and institutional connotations, but that it is a "highly symbolic concept" and a "very complex conversation". But it is also important to recognize, like this author, that the prevailing sense in education institutions and amongst teachers refers to the contents or programs of the subjects that have to be taught.
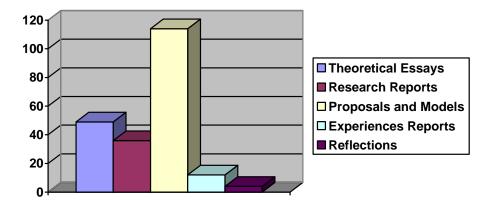
Tendencies in curriculum development

While carrying out the state of knowledge for the nineties, we adopted Gimeno's term of curriculum *development* instead of curriculum *design*, since we thought that the latter was subsumed in the first one and that a concept as "development" includes a wide variety of educational processes, structures and practices related to the curriculum projects and their realization. That is why we thought that the curriculum development matter as study field should not be confined only to the design of curriculum models or proposals, *i. e.* to the formal planning stage. So we expected that studies about curriculum development would not only recount the project as it is, but also the diversity of processes and actions that take place within specific educational and cultural contexts, where specific educational practices are carried out and in which different actors take part.

In quantitative terms, within curriculum development (Díaz Barriga and Lugo, 2003), as we could observe in the previous section, we were able to gather 209 items published between 1990 and 2002. With regard to the *publication type*, those works belonged to the following categories: 9 were compilation or coordinated books (4.3%), 16 individual books (7.65%), 41 book chapters (19.61%), 59 articles in reviews

(28.22%), 23 postgraduate dissertations (11%), 35 communications published in congress reports (16.74%) and 26 internal documents belonging to different universities and authorities of the Ministry of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública) or other organizations related to the education sector (12.44%). We can thus observe that the greatest part of the literature on this subject is published as articles in reviews and book chapters.

On the other hand, and taking into account the *production type*, 49 of those works are essays with theoretical references (22.79%), 36 belong to the category of research reports (16.74%), 114 are curriculum proposals and models (53.02%), 12 are intervention or specific curriculum experiences reports (5.58%) and 4 present reflections on the subject (1.86%); it is important to say that some of those works belong to more than one production type (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Curriculum Development: production type.

What we can highlight here is that *more than fifty per cent of the production consist of curriculum proposals and models*, situation that shows the highly prescriptive and intervention and practice directed nature of this subject. It is also important to quote that the research reports in a strict sense use to be found mainly in dissertations and, to a lesser extent, in review articles. In the same way, we also can observe that a great part of the works related to the most significant curriculum reforms of the nineties do not include research reports, since they are rather internal indicative or technical reports, sometimes very lengthy and with restricted access.

With regard to the educational level they deal with in the above-mentioned production, we find that 18 works (8.41%) focus on basic education (principally primary and, to a lesser extent, secondary education), 17 tackle higher secondary

education (7.94%), 152 higher education (71.02%), 12 postgraduate studies (5.6%) and 15 deal with the education system in general (7%). We also find here some works that can be classified in two different categories, since they deal with two different education levels (for instance, they deal jointly with secondary and higher secondary school, or with higher and postgraduate education). The most important information here is that 7 out of 10 researchers are interested in higher education, which is a paradox if we take into account the country's education pyramid, since the student population in basic education is much bigger than the few who are able to reach higher education.

I think it is very important to highlight that during the implementation of the curriculum reforms in the whole educational system the term *innovation* was easily associated with the design and application of new prototypes and methodological strategies for teaching. From the point of view of the educational administrations, but also many authors share this point of view, this alleged "innovation" was meant to meet the demands faced by the Mexican education in order to deal with a society increasingly globalized, the so-called knowledge society. Therefore the projects have been to a large extent part of educational policies that arose within the context of economic globalization, within a context marked by collaboration and international trade treaties (and principally the North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA, between Mexico, the United States and Canada), the search for official approval and equivalence for educational programs and professions, or the establishment of national and international standards with regard to the professional training and practice, and the decentralization of the national education system as well.

The idea of innovation within the curriculum has been related to models and proposals [1] like the following:

• Competence-based education (CBE);

• Flexible curriculum;

• Managerial approaches like strategic planning, institutional analysis, full-quality and excellence applied to curriculum development and assessment;

• Curriculum based on the psycho-pedagogic constructivism and approaches that belong to the field of cognitive and socio-cultural psychology;

• Meta-curricular training orientated towards the development of cognitive, academic, social, communicational or specific abilities within specific disciplines;

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[1] The detailed references to the studies quoted here for each category can be found in Díaz Barriga and Lugo (2003).

• Curriculum design that focuses on the integration of theory and practice and on professional training by means of practice, service and located experience or real setting experiential teaching;

• Teaching and curriculum program design that focus on problem solving approaches or on problem-based learning (PBL) and on case method teaching, particularly in disciplines such as Mathematics, Medicine, Architecture and Physics;

• The incorporation of new subjects or knowledge domains to the development of curriculum projects, and specially the so-called *transversal* or *cross-curriculum subjects*. Within this category we can highlight the works published along the decade about curriculum and *environmental education*, and more particularly from the point of view of sustainable ecologic development; other emergent subjects are related to the place of *human rights* within the curriculum, education to *moral values*, *civism* and *ethics*; education and *gender*; and, to a lesser extent, curriculum and multi- or interculturality;

• The incorporation of the new information and communication technologies to curriculum and teaching.

Like above, we do not find here unifying visions with regard to these curriculum innovations. The first reason has undoubtedly to do with the polysemy of the term innovation. In many occasions curriculum innovation can be taken as a synonym for incorporation of the trendy educational novelties, and the authors offer neither a deep reflection on its implication nor a clear forecast of its incorporation to the curriculum structures or to the classroom reality. On the other hand, many of those innovations are thought as vertical implementations or introductions that come from the authorities or specialists and must be applied by the actors (teachers and students). Only in few cases the authors really understand innovation as the need for a radical change in the social and educational paradigms and practices within the education community, change that must be a product of the reflection and appropriation of the people who are involved in the process.

The second reason is that the discourse about curriculum that underlies the different theoretical models of innovation comes from different disciplinary and theoretical references. The discourse of models such as competence-based education, flexible curriculum, full-quality, educational reengineering, strategic curriculum planning, institutional analysis, etc. are nothing but signs of the corporative or

managerial way of thinking that has become more and more important within education during the last decade, although it already had supporters since the seventies. This perspective gives priority to the ideas of efficiency, quality and excellence as necessary to create highly competent and competitive human resources, associated with certification and assessment systems for the educational or professional quality and with the search for equivalence between study plans of different institutions, regions and even countries.

What I just said reflects an important tendency: the development of university curriculum during the last twenty years has progressively given up meeting the ideal of "satisfaction of social needs" that had been characterizing the training of professionals in the public universities during the seventies and until the middle of the eighties. Concepción Barrón (1997) considers that the training of Mexican professionals at the end of the twentieth century comes up to the government's industrial restructuring project, seeking to adapt national productive apparatus to technological innovations. That is why in an international context "subject to the frenzy of change" ("sujeto al vértigo del cambio"), the tendency is to modernize the study programs of the universities in order to adapt them to the needs of the business companies, not only national but rather transnational. This has prepared the ground for the invasion of curriculum models based on the delimitation of competences or international professional standards.

Another tendency is also very important in this recount of innovating models, tendency that we had already described: the psycho-pedagogical vision or way of thinking about curriculum and its development (Díaz Barriga, 2003). This tendency is based on the search for new ways to organize curriculum when psychologists or educators make significant critics to study plans that only reflect the structure of the discipline and are organized deductively (*e. g*., the subject curriculum), but that ignore completely the psychological structure of knowledge and the complexity of the human learning processes. Since its very beginning this tendency has been associated with contents analysis and learning experience; several authors consider it already as a part of the new European educationalist school and of the so-called American progressive education, led by John Dewey himself with his work *The child and the curriculum*, published in 1902. One of Dewey's premises is that curriculum must reflect the way in which people learn. This curriculum research tendency is tightly linked to the psychology of learning, development and instruction.

In Mexico, this perspective got stronger during the seventies thanks to the influence of the so-called "cognitive curriculum" based on Piaget and his followers, although they were also influenced by Jerome Bruner or David Ausubel. So we can assert that during the eighties the curriculum reforms in Mexico in initial, preschool and primary education, on one hand, and in the special education programs, on the other, nourished on the psychogenetic and cognitive paradigms (Hernández, 1998).

The fact is that since the middle of the eighties, but more explicitly during the last decade, we can observe that the above-mentioned psychological approaches often are accompanied by the notion of "meta-curriculum". It has been said that academic and professional curriculum should deal with the training of students in high-level learning strategies, develop his thinking abilities and contribute to the acquisition of attitudes and motivations in favor of study and scientific knowledge. Afterwards, this idea reached other domains, far beyond the merely intellectual one, and that is why we can hear nowadays about the need to promote also a wide and flexible range of cooperation, learning self-management, communication, decision-making, creative behavior and problem-solving strategies (F. Díaz Barriga, 1994). This implies that an educational proposal that includes a meta-curricular perspective will be directed to encourage significantly the "learn to learn" and that it will belong to a curriculum approach that focuses on the student and not on the discipline.

On the other hand, we also witness during the nineties the development of a wider vision on the constructivist postulates towards the socio-cultural dimension, led by important English-speaking and Spanish authors. Amongst the latter one of the most significant was undoubtedly César Coll (1987; 1990) and the group of specialists who worked on the Spanish basic and higher secondary education curriculum reform. This influence could be perceived not only in Mexico, but in several Latin American countries, and particularly Chile, Brazil and Argentina, which to a larger extent adopted their postulates and organization model for the curriculum contents.

In Mexico, the planning and implementation of curriculum projects inspired by constructivism (in its different versions) has been able to rely on the efforts of educational research and on several pilot experiments, related to curriculum and to the study of cognitive development and learning processes as well. Their quality, diffusion and impact have been variable. Díaz Barriga, Hernández, García and Muriá (1998) think that the main hindrances for educational proposals like the above-mentioned are two: on one hand, the clash between the already organized culture of the Mexican education

institutions, which live according to their own management processes, and the new philosophy and operational requirements of a new approach such as the constructivist; on the other hand, the deficient training of the teachers. For those authors, the curriculum design and intervention experiences always lack the opportunity to create really flexible and situational curricula, to rely on a real availability of the teachers for their creation and implementation, and to be able to transform the classrooms in enriching scenes, leaving behind a traditionally centralized, transmissive and authoritarian education.

We also can situate within a psycho-pedagogical but higher education oriented perspective several studies and proposals related to training of professionals by means of experiential learning and to training through practice: real setting learning, learning by means of the service to the community, problem-based learning, amongst others. Obviously those "innovations" do not emerge strictly speaking in the nineties, but it is in that period that they get stronger and that they are systematically incorporated –or at least, decision-taking people attempt to-- in curriculum reforms. All the same, because of the purposes and study field to which those researches and proposals belong, great part of them are to be found within the field of specific didactics or research about teaching and learning processes, and not in studies about curriculum in the broad sense of the term. And this is where we begin to see the indifferentiation or overlap between curriculum studies and research about teaching or specific didactics that has been highlighted, for the English-speaking world, by Philip Jackson.

Another important tendency within curriculum development during the nineties is the integration of transversal or cross-curriculum subjects. According to Palos (2000), cross-subjects bring up for curriculum and teaching essential questioning, as expressions of the most significant problems and conflicts faced nowadays by our society. Within those cross-subjects values, attitudes and behaviors are taken into account, not only the students' but also of the other collectivities which belong to our society. To a larger extent they are the result of the burden undergone by a society in which it is more and more difficult to find models of justice, equality, respect to the human rights and protection of the environment. They also are the result of very important and profound questionings about the purposes and the ideal ways to run an organized education at school which has not been able to provide the kids and young people an adequate training with regard to those aspects. The cross-subjects in curriculum have been specially important during the last decade, not only on an

international level, but also within the country, and they were the target of several significant curriculum reforms at the different levels of the educational system.

The works reviewed by Díaz Barriga and Lugo seem to highlight that this tendency emerged from the need to strengthen the ethical dimension of curriculum, to take into account integrally the human development process of the students and to train productive and responsible individuals who are besides able to commit with their social setting. In some curriculum proposals, at least on the discursive level, the stress is put on training critic citizens aware of their own country's or the world's social and politic problems.

Latapí (1999), however, in his review of civic and ethical education included in the secondary education curriculum during the 2000-2001 academic year finds that it lacks a well-defined philosophy and a clear vision about moral education. This author considers that the subjects are tackled from the "must be" dimension without reaching a real contrast with the national actuality that could make possible a real questioning of the contradictions and conflicts which make up the social system. From our point of view, it would be more than necessary for subjects like the above-mentioned (civic education, human rights, minorities, equality and justice, etc.) to be discussed openly, and, instead of talking about "transversalizing curriculum" and meaning by it to allow those subjects to permeate through all the other courses, to consider that their incorporation requires to lead the student to a critical analysis of the micro and macro-ethical domains and to strengthen in him a political culture for social participation, question that has been rather overlooked until now.

As a consequence, the introduction of cross-subjects also meant a real challenge: to introduce the respective educational innovations for an appropriate teaching of those subjects. With regard to the design of plans and programs, it was necessary not only to question the concept of "transversality" itself, but we also witnessed the emergence of controversies about whether it was necessary or not that those cross-subjects (*e. g.* human right education, sexuality, addiction prevention, environmental education, ethics and civic education, consumer education, etc.) should be incorporated into study plans and programs as subjects with their own curricular space and taught according to a specific didactic approach, or they should rather cross all the courses of the specific curricula. Another option, known as "double crossing", suggested another possibility: to give them a space of their own as specific courses or modules and to introduce this subject throughout the whole study plan.

A glance at the international level

Several authors consider that theorizing on curriculum and curriculum development in the English-speaking and the European domain is currently limited to the problem of the educational contents and its distribution within the classroom. So the possibilities to see the meaning of theorization and research about curriculum as a way to look at the future tightly connected in a broad sense to human training have been consigned to oblivion, and that is what Hamilton (1996: 6) calls the "short-term question: that is, when the question 'What should they (the students) know?' came to replace the strategic question of curriculum: 'What should they become?'". Hamilton states that since the middle of the nineties the terms *didactics*, *pedagogy* and *curriculum* overlapped. Philip Jackson, in the 1992 edition of the *Handbook of Research on Curriculum* he coordinated, partly agrees with the previous statement.

Jackson says that the notion of curriculum that prevails in most of the studies is limited to the "implementation or assessment of specific subjects or topics within the curriculum of one specific educational institution or a group of institutions". At the same time, Jackson considers that this is quantitatively the most important production and that it is rather detailed, technical and inconsistent if we compare it with the curriculum production which aims to "construct theories or general principles about curriculum development or wide perspectives on curriculum as a whole or of its status as a field of study". (Jackson, 1992: 3). In Mexico, without denying that the production has been actually rather prolific and that there has been a significant increase of the interest and a great diversification of the research subjects, we notice that the main trend of the studies coincides with Hamilton's and Jackson's observation.

However, on the other hand we can not assert, in the case of Mexico, that the field of curriculum development "died" or that it lives in a "restricted" situation, like William Pinar himself (Henderson, 2001) recently stated[2]. At least, they do not represent the main trend amongst the works that are carried out based on the logic of the education institutions.

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[2] In Pinar, Reynolds, Slaterry and Taubman (1995:6) we find that "curriculum development was born in 1918 and died in 1969", which refers to the period in which actions like arranging and organizing curriculum, and in giving it a scientifically grounded rationality, were the main interests of the research field.

We have to consider separately the subject of academicals or curriculum researchers, tightly connected in Mexico to the universities and the educational research centers, whose production actually does come closer to Pinar's idea of a curriculum *understanding*, that is when they try to understand its historical, political, phenomenological, identity referents. It is precisely on this level where during the last decade several critical essays were written about the following topics: the dilemmas that curriculum must tackle in front of the globalization within a totally subordinated economy like the Mexican; the problem of environmental education; the role of mass-media and new technologies; the problem of diversity and the conflicts caused by multiculturality and identity in curriculum projects; critics related to the strategies and policies imposed by international organizations that influence education and curriculum, amongst other.

Therefore we analyzed the Eurydice report (2000), in order to resume and at the same time compare the tendencies we could find in the Mexican production about curriculum development with the elements about curriculum and teaching in the European higher education institutions from the beginning of the eighties until the nineties. In this report, the quoted tendencies come from publications and important database of the European Community.

The first important element is that the notion of what can be understood as curriculum in most of the studies and reforms that are informed in the European Community agrees with what we already said. "Curriculum" is the structure and content of the subjects or programs in higher education institutions and is usually related to the kind of certifications or degrees granted. In this case, curriculum is tightly linked to teaching, which includes the educational approach, the student assessment methodologies, the training procedures, the academic staff recruitment and the assessment of teaching quality.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to carry out in this paper an extended statement of the tendencies shared by the European curriculum reforms and the Mexican situation, and we need here to make it clear that in several categories it has been very difficult to decide whether it is, in the Mexican case, a general trend, because of the great diversity that can be found within our educational system, not only in its different schooling levels and subsystems, but also with regard to the high contrast between public and private universities and the differences between the federated states of the Republic facing the educational federalization process. However, and although we do not pretend

to offer an homogeneous outlook in either case, we can highlight the following common tendencies:

• The main objective of the curriculum reforms during the analyzed period was the planning of courses (study programs, curriculum plans);

• The principal structural change consisted in an increase in the quantity of institutions that offer professional training (in Mexico it is true for the private institutions);

• There is a great diversity between the different states/countries and, within them, between the educational systems and modalities;

• The enrollment or coverage experienced a huge increase, although in Mexico it is possible to notice that the purpose was, at the same time, to slow down enrollment in the most important public universities;

• The traditional, theoretical, academic courses turned to be inappropriate yet, although it is not that clear that teaching has been changing so radically;

• There were efforts to strengthen the connections between higher education and the labor market;

• External student assessment and quality assessment have been implemented;

• Flexible curriculum, *i. e.* the system based on credits, has been introduced or strengthened;

• Practical training and job experience has been introduced as significant constituents of the higher education courses;

• There is a higher emphasis on the teachers' educational competences;

• At the first educational levels, teaching is still based on ex cathedra conferences (lecturing) with large groups of students;

• The main assessment way is still the formal way by means of written examinations;

• An increase in the use of new communication technologies can be noticed, although in many cases their educational use is not entirely clear.

We also were able to identify significant differences, such as for instance that the European Community informs that most of the changes took place gradual and progressively, and that they arose from institutional and national planning processes and policies, after being pilot programs. In Mexico, quite the opposite, only few projects experienced a pilot stage or a continuous monitoring process, such as the controversial curriculum operation test for primary education, carried out at the beginning of the nineties. Many European countries have implemented a preparatory course that lasts

two or three years before university (not equivalent to our Mexican high school) and higher studies are organized in progressive cycles.

In the *International Handbook of Curriculum Research* that he coordinates, Pinar (2003) asserts that this work is the first attempt to shape "the architecture of curriculum studies worldwide", since it takes into account and deals with the history and the current state of this research area in 29 countries spread about the five continents. The most interesting aspect of those studies is that they do absolutely not try to standardize or to validate from a hegemonic point of view the way of thinking or the policies of governmental and educational organizations, and even less the big corporations' or industrialized nations' logic and economic interests. In their discourse, the authors make clear that it is all but convenient to offer naïvely guidelines to homogenize or standardize the academic curriculum, and even less when the purpose is to turn it into some "international curriculum". As a matter of fact, the main point of convergence turns out to be the concern about the increasing tendency in educational system to adopt thoughtlessly cultural and economic products and policies associated with the phenomenon of the so-called globalization.

At the same time, however, the authors admit the local and national nature of the curriculum conceptions and studies. This makes easier to understand Pinar's statement that what really matters is not to achieve a common and standardized curriculum development project, but to come to an understanding of curriculum from a perspective which admits diversity. Nevertheless, it is possible to find common problems and referents; that is why, without pretending to offer an unifying perspective, we quote here several points of convergence with some of the results we have found in our state of knowledge about curriculum research in Mexico:

• Studies about curriculum history are relatively scarce in the different countries taken into account in the compilation, at least if we compare with the great number of works directed to the intervention or delimitation of curriculum policies.

• In several countries the studies show an indifferentiation and contradictions between the academic and intellectual side of research and the curriculum theories, on one hand, and, on the other hand, the activities and proposals of the "official educational agencies". That is why it is still possible to assert that the strain between, on one hand, the questions *what* and *wherefore* (critical discourse) and, on the other, *how* (technical discourse) has not disappeared yet.

• Many nations seemingly have, like Mexico, to deal with the preponderance of the rational and technological approaches, of the "managerial way of thinking", above all in the field of reforms and long-term projects, and this perspective is gaining ground in many educational systems; of course there are exceptions, since we also can find information about experiences that go in the other direction, such as the Brazilian and Japanese projects.

• Nevertheless, the growing adoption of the above-mentioned managerial perspective about education has a great deal of influence on the restructuring of the teaching function, leading to a situation where standardized assessments and approaches such as accountability, competition and performance are actually ruling.

• What also can be noticed is the adoption of the discourse and the practical models of the American theoreticians (the so-called "satellitization" or "colonization") and, of course, the local resistance against it. This can be found repeatedly in several chapters, above all in the essays written by Latin American researchers, but also in the case of countries like Botswana or Australia. In Mexico, this situation has been examined since the seventies by different authors, most of them belonging to the so-called critical pedagogy, who resisted actively the simplistic application of the models created by authors such as Tyler, Mager or Bloom.

• Nowadays, in a rather academic setting and with the support of significant studies, what can be noticed is the emergence of postmodern and poststructuralist approaches, and, above all, of discourses that highlight multiculturality, gender and race problems with regard to curriculum, and the proliferation of multiple approaches to the subject of identity construction by means of the curriculum and, in a broad sense, of the different actors' educational experiences. In Brazil, Da Silva (1999) carries out a theoretical analysis of those approaches, whereas in Mexico F. Díaz Barriga (2003) recounts the emergence of the tendency that consists in interpretative studies focused on subjects within curriculum; afterwards, in our state of knowledge, Torres (2003) reports several works published during the nineties within the category of curriculum processes and practices.

Final comments: the pending agenda

Before closing this exposition, I would like to make some comments in order to highlight some of the pending points in our agenda after analyzing the Mexican production about curriculum.

Although we can notice the emergence of a diversity of models and conceptual and methodological proposals which attempted to bring innovations into curriculum, we find amongst them very different ways to interpret and put into practice the reference models. Likewise, most of the studies target at drawing up proposals, arguing or defending the models, but only few of them show results, assessments or information that makes possible to determine the success and impact of what has been planned, or even recount the mechanism and conditions under which the described curriculum innovations are operating. In this sense, one of the important task will be to start monitoring and assessing them to some extent. It will also be important to elucidate the meaning that those models and proposals actually represent for the actors. For instance, we ignore the results of teacher training in the competence based models, and the way in which they put it into practice within the classroom (if they really do so). We also ignore whether there are or not examples of opposition, resistance or even boycott in the curriculum change processes and, if there is, how significant is their impact.

During the nineties we can observe a notorious decreasing of curriculum design by conceptual objectives and the emergence of a new tendency within curriculum design and decision-making, associated with a new perspective on the development of "educational models" that attempted to offer comprehensive features and widespread application options, at least in higher secondary and higher education. Nevertheless, we still lack an accurate analysis of to what extent the so-called "models" meet the criteria that define the concept itself of ideal or model with sound conceptual and methodological bases and a clear curriculum development strategy. According to Santoyo (1996:7), rather than models in full sense we are facing a "very peculiar way in which each institution organizes its own professional training programs". In any case, the tendency appears to be to draw up located or local projects with a stamp of their own, which attempt to meet the demands of the original educational context.

With regard to the theoretical and disciplinary approaches that prevailed during the decade, we can not deny the influence of psychological and educational constructivism in its different aspects and application possibilities. Another pending aspect is to improve the promotion of research able to lead to a better analysis of the way in which the approaches are reinterpreted by the actors and the real possibilities to translate them into significant changes within curriculum and teaching.

Apparently, during the nineties the education institutions, and above all the higher education institutions, reached a greater decision-making autonomy with regard

to curriculum. However, we do not know for sure whether this materialized into practice, whether it was subject to a negotiation process, what kind of tensions they had to deal with, or finally curriculum design is limited by the policies and guidelines enforced by national and international organizations. Several authors consider that authorities such as the National Assessment Council (Consejo Nacional de Evaluación, CENEVAL), amongst others, has turned into the big "curriculum designer", since it delimits, by means of its assessment systems and tools, which basic contents are to be taught. In the same way, we foresee for the next decade, a growing presence within curriculum development of professional groups and associations, governmental and non-governmental organizations, management councils, or diverse social associations in order to deal with the boost given assessment, accreditation and certification systems for learning and competences. This implies that the task of developing curriculum has ceased to be exclusively in hands of the academic groups in a strict sense, and turns out to be open to other kinds of concerns and interests. We still do not know for sure, however, to what extent this changes will impact on curriculum.

This is why we should give priority, not as a backstage item but as a main character, to a critical discussion about the regional, national and international settings, problems and policies that define both the restrictions and possibilities for curriculum research and reforms. Above all, we have to understand the important tensions and contradictions that arise between local, national and global settings, and the interests of the diverse actors as well.

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N. B. para la lectura:
e. g. = exempli gratia **(también se puede decir "for example", "for instance")**
i. e. = id est **(también se puede decir "that is")**