

# Transformation of Teachers as Active Agents in Curriculum Building

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## Struggles in relation to the curriculum in Colombia

In Colombia, the General Law of Education (Law 115 of 1994) established curricular autonomy for institutions in all educative levels. Hence, every school and educative institution has decentralized administrative and pedagogical autonomy to define their own curriculum by means of the Institutional Educative Project (IEP). The Ministry of Education approves standards and guidelines for the actions and decisions of institutions and their advisors. Nonetheless, these principles do not replace teachers in decision making in relation to contents, teaching and evaluation methods.

Before that, the view of the curriculum introduced in Colombia in the 70's was grounded on the idea of "planning" –very similar to the one developed in USA at the beginning of the XX century where the curricular theory was born (Pinar, 2014). Such view generated an important resistance in Colombian educators and educative researchers who rejected the notion of curriculum centered on planning as opposed to pedagogy, centered in the knowledge of teachers regarding what to teach, how to teach it and the purpose of teaching it (Montoya, 2014). Such resistance gave place to several movements aimed at repositioning teachers and pedagogy as the core of the educative field: Intellectual Field of Education (Campo Intelectual de la Educación – CIE), the Field of Pedagogy (Campo de la Pedagogía – CP) and the Colombian Pedagogical Movement (Movimiento Pedagógico Colombiano –MPC). These movements had a great impact on the change proposed in the General Law of Education.

According to Montoya (2014), in two decades said movements failed to sort the challenge of curricular autonomy, because most of them continued to build a view that undermined curricular studies rather than generating a deep comprehension of the meaning of the curriculum and its relation to pedagogy. This understanding of the curriculum as a factor that weakens pedagogy had two consequences in Colombia (Montoya, 2014). First, the exclusion of the study of the curriculum from the study plan in the initial training of teachers both for normal schools - there are institutions where



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youngsters are trained to be teachers while they complete their basic education -, and for university teacher programs in which the concept is only mentioned as an operational organization of contents and activities. Second, other curricular perspectives, as the procedural or practical (in which teachers are the ones who make decisions about the curriculum and use formative evaluation to research the effectiveness of their designs) or the critical perspective (in which the curriculum is seen in turn as a device for social reproduction and a tool for social change in the hands of the teachers) are not recognized by Colombian teachers, restraining their action in relation to curricular autonomy.

Then again, despite curricular autonomy, most schools have adopted curricula from editorials, consultants and other institutions, doing exactly what they did before they had the power to design their own curricula. This has resulted in de-contextualized curricula in which teachers have almost no power (Molano, 2011), and which do not contribute to the objective of improving the quality of education in the country.

### **40x40 Curriculum for Academic Excellence and Comprehensive Education: Policy of Bogota**

As stated by Weber (1919), the concept of policy is broad enough as to include any type of autonomous directive activity. He defines policy as the aspiration to participate in power or influence the distribution of power among the different groups that comprise a single State. Within this perspective, Crick (1962) suggests that policy is the result of accepting difference in social groups, and hence there are diverse traditions and interests within a territorial unit depending on a single government. From this view, public policies are understood as actions linked to problems and associated to specific solutions to address public affairs; curricular reforms are one example of this.

In the particular context of the district educational institutions of Bogota, the policy of Bogota Humana (2012-2014) gave birth to a priority project to reduce segregation and discrimination, and make people the main concern of development (SED, *Orientaciones Generales*, 2014). In this sense, increasing the number of school hours by means of the unique school journey of 40 hours was meant to rise learning opportunities for children and youngsters. Hence, the Curriculum for Excellence and Comprehensive Education was conceived as the proper framework to design and implement programs to offer quality education in Bogota.

By the end of 2013, the District Education Secretariat (*Secretaría de Educación Distrital* -SED) asked the Specialization Program on Curriculum and Pedagogy from the Education Training Research Center –CIFE of Los Andes University to advise them in the writing of the guidelines of this district policy. Accordingly, a team of CIFE researchers, officers from SED and public teachers worked collaboratively for one year in the production of the policy documents.

The policy documents include guidelines about quality of education, the concept of human development, lessons for a good living, comprehensive curriculum, evaluation, responsibilities of the different social actors and pedagogical strategy guiding the required curricular reform (SED, *Orientaciones Generales*, 2014). The policy has four transverse pillars: education for citizen connivance and coexistence, differential approach, gender-based approach and education supported on technology. These pillars are meant to underpin all cycles and areas of the curriculum, enabling a more comprehensive approach of education in district schools. Subsequently, these documents were shared with other teachers and actors from the schools.

Nevertheless, aware of the resistance mentioned in the previous in relation to curricular studies in Colombia, the members of CIFE considered necessary to design a teacher training for the re-signification of the concept of curriculum and the



empowerment of teachers in building curricula in line with the proposals of the policy and responding to their particular contexts. Hence, a course was designed based on the curricular view of CIFE, involving a critical perspective in which teachers are designers, promoters and evaluators of their curriculum (Posner, 1995; Stenhouse, 1984).

CIFE adheres to the position of Posner (1995), suggesting that the curriculum encompasses all the educative experiences planned by the institutions for their students. They also use the author's view of concurrent curriculum for the curricular analysis. Concurrent curriculum means that there is not a unique curriculum but five coexisting dimensions of it: the official curriculum, the operative curriculum, the hidden curriculum, the null curriculum and the additional curriculum. Different authors in the field of curricular studies have proposed these dimensions, introducing them altogether provides a powerful analytic comprehension of the different processes and actors within educative institutions as micro-systems, which in turn aids in establishing relations between different spheres of the educative system.

Posner (1995) describes the official curriculum as the formal documents that materialize it in study plans. It includes sequences, evaluation methods and public policy components. The operative curriculum refers the actual class practices and evaluations, namely what actually happens in the everyday educative processes of teaching and evaluation. The hidden curriculum consists of the norms and values that are not explicitly presented by educative institutions. It includes beliefs about evaluation, the role of teachers, gender and inclusion affairs, etc. The null curriculum comprises the subjects and contents that are not taught and the considerations about why they are not taught. Finally, the additional curriculum corresponds to all the other experiences that are not part of the subjects and which in many cases arise from the students' interests. They are not hidden and have an acknowledged dimension in the educative process.

The design of the course to bring the participants closer to the policy 40x40 Curriculum for Excellence and Comprehensive Education adopted this view of the curricular analysis, keeping the character of collective construction.

## Teachers' perceptions

According to authors like Berger and Luckmann (1973), reality is socially built in the interaction between the existing reality, the one that is being built and the knowledge that its actors have about it. Thus, the knowledge built pertains to the specific social context. The perspective of Berger and Luckmann (1973) is complemented by the view of Durkheim that emphasizes on social facts as means and ends of knowledge building, and Weber's assumption of subjective meaning of action as part of the object of knowledge.

Studying the perceptions about teaching and learning is a matter of interest in the current educative research on teacher's professional development processes (Hernandez, Maquilón & Monroy, 2012; Marshall, Summers & Woolnogh, 1999; & Vilanova, García & Señorino, 2007). Therefore, this type of study is relevant to develop a process of continuous teacher training for schools in Bogota. For this particular research, the concept of perception refers to "eclectic mental constructs that come from different sources: personal experiences, prejudice, judgments, ideas, intentions" (Aparicio & Hoyos, 2008). These mental constructs are highly subjective and vaguely delimited. Nonetheless, they give meaning to the acts of teachers in the classroom. Thus, perceptions are defined as the teacher's ideas that constitute their position in relation to a personal, professional and institutional reality. In the case of



systematization process, there was evidence of perceptions related to the policy itself. This approach on perceptions was the general framework for the analysis and reflection on the curricular issue described in the results section.

Perceptions on how and what the students must learn have an influence on the curriculum put into practice -that is to say the operative curriculum. These perceptions are mainly based on the learning style of the particular teacher. Hence, identifying the beliefs and knowledge that the main actors have about teaching and learning is a key aspect to improve educative processes (Vilanova, García & Señorino, 2007), and contributes to the understanding of the subtleties of learning. In this regard, Ramsden (1987) suggests that research on the matter should be done in the context in which the teaching - learning take place, so that the results have a better application and use for teachers in their classrooms.

### Course description

The course is based on a socio-cultural view of learning, in which learning is a social process in which learners progressively become participants of the cultural ways of thinking, being and reflecting, mediated by interaction, language, signs and cultural artifacts (Radford, 2008). In this way, since learning is not considered an individual and isolated enterprise, but is spread and transformed by the different members of the community with their different levels of expertise (Lave & Wenger, 1991, & Wenger, 1998), the connection between knowing and being is fundamental. Reflection, as a relation between the learner and the cultural-historical reality, plays a very important role in the elaboration of the learner, both in what he/she knows and in whom he/she becomes (Radford, 2008).

This view of learning is consistent with a critical view of the curriculum (Posner, 1995, & Montoya, 2008), in which teachers are its direct builders. Thus, empowering them in this function will enable systematic changes in their teaching practice, resulting in a better quality of education. Therefore, CIFE did an important effort in providing a participative and reflexive experience to the teachers, enabling them to replicate similar practices in their schools. On these grounds, the course began by addressing the need to extend the vision about curricular theories by reading and discussing the work of authors like Doyle (1992), Gimeno-Sacristan (1991, 2010), Goodson (2000), Posner (1995) and Stenhouse (1984) in small groups. Then, they prepared digital portfolios on Moodle platform. As part of this activity, the participants were invited to record their reflections and the relation of the sessions with their teaching practices.

Following the planned activities, the content of the documents of the public policy 40x40 Curriculum for Academic Excellence and Comprehensive Education was addressed, starting by the different elements proposed in it and their possible implementations based on the lessons for a good living. The sessions designed to discuss and analyze the transversal pillars –citizen connivance and coexistence, differential approach, gender approach, the use of CIT in Education- were object of reflection in relation to their everyday experiences. Many of them were recorded in the portfolios.

Finally, the work of Elliott (1993) and other published articles were introduced as the last theoretical element addressed to understand the methodological proposal of Participative Action Research. These readings illustrated how this methodology can provide lessons for good living and educative transformation. Consistent with this, different curriculum designs were elaborated (in small groups according to common interests or individually) considering the interests raised by the policy, the teachers' particular contexts, the different elements analyzed and the strategic pillars. These



designs were recorded in posters that were presented and discussed by all the participants in the last session of the course that was open to the public.

The course lasted 40 hours, organized in 3-hour sessions during 3 weeks. 120 teachers participated in the course in response to an open invitation from the Education Secretariat for teachers from all district schools of Bogota. The design of the micro-curriculum sessions was done by expert teachers of CIFE -16 people enrolled in CIFE, all of them with Master's degrees on Education. These experts worked in couples, guiding groups of sessions according to their area of expertise. These people contributed to the main ideas of each topic and advised on specific ways to address them; they also provided reading material and material to develop the sessions.

Provided that the course was intended to disseminate the policy 40x40 Curriculum for Academic Excellence and Comprehensive Education, it is relevant to ask whether this objective was met. Hence, this article shares the results of the systematization of the experience lived in the course by answering two questions: What are the perceptions of the teachers about the course? And, what are the main ideas learned by the teachers in the course?

## Methodology

We conceive systematization as a strategy to produce knowledge relevant to understand educative practices more in depth by critical reflection about them. Different authors (Torres, 1999; Jara 1994, & Jara, 2006) agree that systematization is a way to recover the knowledge produced in social and educative intervention projects and generate systematic understandings about them. In addition, this process is based on the critical-hermeneutic paradigm that intends to comprehend and interpret what takes place in the development of a project, particularly in the intervention practice (Cendales, 2004).

The systematization was done based on the analysis of the instruments designed for data collection throughout the course:

- Field journals developed by the teachers of the course: at the end of every session each couple of teachers recorded in a document the progress of the session, their perceptions about them, and the challenges for coming sessions.
- Class observations: conducted by one person in charge of systematizing who did 6 observations in total.
- Portfolios: developed by the teachers throughout the course; they recorded 80 portfolios in total.
- Surveys: a survey was conducted in the last session of the course; 70 surveys were completed.
- Interviews: one of the people in charge of systematizing did 4 in-depth interviews with teachers about their impressions and lessons learned in the course.

The information was transcribed and analyzed using the analysis methodology proposed by the Grounded Theory, using the NVivo software. The information collected with the different instruments was triangulated and grouped by categories, both pre-established and emerging. Next, we will present and discuss the results.

## Results and discussion

At first, the analysis was conducted according to two categories: "perceptions about the curricular and pedagogical proposal of the course" and "lessons learned in the course". Short after, a third category appeared: "perceptions about the 40x40 Curriculum for Academic Excellence and Comprehensive Education", which is relevant



in the Colombian context of curricular studies and struggles between the teachers' views on the curriculum and the views of policy builders. We will start by presenting the results found in relation to the third category, more related to the general context of curricular studies in Colombia. These results illustrate how teachers read, appropriate and adapt public policies to the curricula of their schools. Then, we will continue with the category of perceptions about the curricular and pedagogical proposal of the course and we will close with the perceptions of the lessons learned in the course.

### **Perceptions about the 40x40 Curriculum for Academic Excellence and Comprehensive Education**

The teachers that took the course had different profiles; some of them came from schools that had been working for two years in the processes described by the policy and their experience was reinforced by the documents; others only manifested their interest in the topic although the schools they worked in had not yet implemented the policy. Moreover, there were teachers from almost all the areas, 'linkage teachers' and coordinators. The 'linkage teachers' are teachers of the institution who have no class time and use their time to implement the policy 40x40 Curriculum for Academic Excellence and Comprehensive Education. It is worth highlighting that all the participant teachers expressed a genuine interest in understanding the policy because they consider it is positive for education; as one of the interviewed teachers said:

*Rather than 40x40 it should be called open classroom because the classroom used to be very closed, focused on cognitive aspects and there was no time for experimental aspects. Now with the 40x40 project the classroom has to be more open and provide the necessary space for students to apply cognitive learning to other possibilities provided by the project, which is very positive. (Interview teacher 4)*

Nonetheless, some kind of struggle was evident in much of the information collected from the teachers. For example, in the analysis of the portfolios, we found expressions of reluctance:

*It is very difficult at school to progress in the 40x40 project. Communication is quite poor in the institution, agreements are avoided and there is resistance to work and change.*

*It hasn't been easy to work on the curricular integration. We started with documents jointly prepared by the school management and some teachers, but they are not reinforced or appropriated by the educative community. Nonetheless, the documents are an excellent work and we have the challenge to implement them and make them a reality.*

*Many are not even aware of it [the policy and its documents] and they think we are going to take their current tasks from them. They don't understand that we are broadening the possibility of development and learning for the institution and obviously for the children. (Participations in portfolio)*

And one of the teachers said the following in the interview:

*There is resistance in some teachers that are old-school and may feel their methodology is threatened because the project requires giving the students something different from what they have in the classroom, and in that moment they might prefer to be in the project rather than being in a class. (Interview teacher 4)*

More than showing the difficulties generated by an environment of uncertainty that triggers resistance to change, the analysis of these perceptions evinces the great challenges for the appropriation of the policy in the institutional curriculum. On one hand, few people are currently working on the official curriculum, which is merely documental and oriented to planning. Provided its reduced appropriation both at the



personal and institutional levels, there is the challenge of taking it to the operative curriculum and concrete actions of teachers. On the other hand, there is also a lack of critical thinking in relation to the aspects that have not been traditionally addressed in the school -which would be part of the null curriculum-and which the policy intends to make explicit and official to favor the quality of education. In this sense, deepening in the theoretical work of authors like Posner (1995), Gimeno (1991, 2010) or Goodson (2000) is highly relevant for the teachers to discuss and appropriate these aspects; ultimately, this will lead to making decisions and looking for strategies become autonomous in the implementation of the guidelines of the policy.

Another issue identified is that there is an important group of teachers and directors that do not know the official documents of the policy and yet are in charge of establishing the agreements to modify the Institutional Educative Project (IEP). When asked about this in the interview, one of the teachers said:

*All the actors of the school need to be trained because the 40x40 project has not been very well accepted and we have overcome obstacles day by day. This is like stumbling and falling, so it would be interesting to train other people that are not currently part of the project because this will benefit the entire educative community. Otherwise, it is very unlikely that this is studied in depth. (Interview teacher 3)*

This information is consistent with some results identified in the responses to the open questions of the final survey in which some teachers expressed the following:

*Based on what I did here we submitted a proposal of curricular integration, but it was not very well-received by the academic coordinators and the headmaster herself. They need this kind of training. (Final survey)*

In both pieces of data there is the idea of extending the training to the entire educative community, especially those who have authority roles and make decisions. The participation of one single person per school in these processes is not enough because in general the collective building of the curriculum and the policy end up invalidating these change initiatives.

Another aspect worth mentioning is that very seldom the teachers used the term public policy. Instead, they call it a project, as if it was something optional and lasting for as long as the external system takes to change the documents. During the interview, one of the teachers said:

*While reading the documents during the course I was surprised that topics as the cycles, standards and other programs like 'Ciudad-Escuela' that was a program from a different administration are so articulated. I liked that because it seems there is a process. (Interview teacher 3)*

Again, this reflection confirms how difficult it is to capture these guidelines in the institutional curricula, considering the definition of perceptions as the ideas of the teacher that constitute his/her position regarding a personal, professional and institutional reality (Aparicio & Hoyos, 2008). The teachers' perception of the educative policies as temporary supports their resistance to change: 'if everything will change again anyway, I can continue doing what I already do'. This issue should be seriously considered by policy makers to recover and strengthen elements provided by previous policies, so that there is more willingness of the stakeholders to work in new processes.

This is not a minor challenge, since it implies breaking a dynamic of many years. The results also acquaint for the effort of the Education Secretariat to attain better acceptance of the policy 40x40 Curriculum for Academic Excellence and Comprehensive Education by appointing teachers in every school as "linkage teachers" –rather than using external agents- to promote it. In turn, this action that intended to be



more empowering has its own issues. In the interview, one of the “linkage teachers” refers to his/her duties:

*Something that draws my attention is that we do not have specific functions as linkage teachers. We don't know what we are going to do when we are appointed as the linkage teacher. I only know that it means that everything will change. I think that it implies that I will go from being a classroom teacher to be someone from management because my work is developing activities, looking for resources, finding ways to incorporate the 40x40 program in the school. The school assumes this is something separate, something different from the school affairs, so everyone says: 'that is something from the 40x40 program, send it to the linkage teacher'. Everything works as if it was something different from the actual activity of the institution, but the point is that it must be part of the everyday life of the school. (Interview teacher 2)*

Given this change of role, the teacher feels he has lost his identity in the group and as part of management he is object of resistance as the policy is. In practice, the teachers do not want to make it part of the everyday dimension of the curriculum.

The results of this category support the hypothesis of Montoya (2014) that there is a poor vision of the concept of curriculum in the collective of Colombian teachers. As mentioned before, as long as teachers see the curriculum as an organizer and in many cases reduce its conceptualization to the official document, they will miss the chance to take advantage of the explanatory nature of the curriculum at other levels. Thus, the operative curriculum and the pedagogical practices cannot be addressed or developed to appropriate the public policy. In addition, there is resistance to matters that have not been addressed, which may be part of the hidden or the null curriculum and which are evident in the light of the policy. These issues reinforce the idea that the State disempowers the teachers and forces them to offer an education that does not consider their views. The questions are: What kind of actions is required to change this attitude of resistance? Who should perform them? This matter will be discussed later.

### **Perceptions about the curricular and pedagogical proposal of the course**

The results of the survey conducted in the last session of the course show that 100% of the teachers experienced a significant work environment throughout the course. In the surveys, they also expressed that the proposal of the course defied the idea of the teachers about training courses, especially due to its practical, reflexive and pertinent component, different from traditional pedagogy and lectures as its main device:

*It is very relevant because it wasn't talking about something that we are not addressing; it wasn't talking about a curriculum course without relating it to the practice. They began with theoretical foundations because it was necessary to contextualize, but as the course evolved, it became pertinent; now I understand a lot of things because 40x40 is much more than the two hours that kids spend in an activity, it is much more than that. (Interview teacher 3)*

*Another aspect is its focus on learning and we, as students, were permanently building knowledge. I felt that they led us to build it ourselves and that is when meaningful learning takes place, because you have experiences, knowledge, theoretical and practical inputs, and others are built collectively. They did not focus on telling us; instead it came from us and it is a very laudable task, because everything is different when things come up and you have to deal with them according to certain objectives and purposes. For a program to be successful, it needs good teachers. I think: how can all these contributions be modeled and led towards a purpose? And this experience was a good example of how to do it. (Interview teacher 1)*



When asked directly about the quality of the course, 65.71% graded the course as excellent and 25.71% as good. In addition, due the way in which the sessions were developed, by the end of the course 50% of the teachers stated that the course increased their interest in studying the curriculum. Altogether, these results show that the proposal was successful and pleasant for the teachers. These results are quite encouraging, considering that the course also addressed conflictive issues in the curricular context in Colombia and involved the teachers in reflexive processes about them.

Analyzing the pedagogical proposal, using a socio-cultural approach to learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Radford, 2008, & Wenger, 1998) implies a permanent negotiation of meaning to elaborate own understandings. Thus, during the sessions the teachers were invited to inquire, discuss, represent, evaluate and socialize their knowledge and ideas in relation to different issues from the curricular re-design and teacher's identity. In the interviews, the teachers acknowledged the value of this proposal:

*You can find a lot of information in books, but not in interaction. I liked something that perhaps we have forgotten, and it is exploring knowledge. Sometimes I wondered: 'the conference is over... Is that it? What do we do after 20 minutes? And it was us who had to look for the answer of what we wanted, by talking and working together. (Interview teacher 2)*

*The training proposal surprised me, in terms of how the course was developed by means of an active model in which every student progressively built knowledge based on experiences, some references and tools they gave us, , and by cooperative work with other people. So, for me, the exercise was quite enriching; I learned a lot about how to do it. (Interview teacher 4)*

This evidence shows that, coming from a background in which the curriculum and the teaching practice is content-oriented, the teachers were surprised to be able to address such contents from a different perspective. By building a practice community (Wenger, 1998) their participation in the negotiation of meaning was permanent: the dialogue with the teachers from the course and the joint enterprise helped them re-signify the role of teachers and students in this kind of pedagogical approaches.

In the class observations the following aspects were recurrent:

*As regards to the interaction processes, it was interesting to observe how moments for socializing, discussing and talking about each other's experiences were encouraged. (Observation, June 4)*

*It is interesting because in the conversations among pairs the teachers talk in first person... These are sentences like "It is difficult for me" "For example, we do..." "We decided" "For me..." This may imply a different acknowledgement of the practice, more reflexive". (Observation, June 18)*

And in the portfolios some reflections like:

*After every session I record in my portfolio different reflections based on the experiences that I hear from my partners, similar to those that I live day by day, with the difference that the activities of this course enable consensus of knowledge, points of view and arguments, mediated by the authors that we read. (Participation in portfolio)*

These elements are very valuable because when the teachers share their experiences, they express and re-build their identity. For Wenger (1998), identity is defined by experiences of participation and filiation in certain communities that allow belonging and it is through this constant participation that individuals can recognize who they are, what decisions they make, and their approach to difficulties within the possibilities of such community.



Thus, by sharing with other teachers, identifying similarities in their ways of participation, in the understanding of the curriculum, public policy and their relation with these concepts, teachers were empowered in the topics under study and realized they are likely to build the curriculum:

*The program tells you: you can continue to create the curriculum from the perspective of your institution, your school or think that the students or the community are interested on learning things and you have the chance of building the curriculum considering those interests. (Interview teacher 1)*

*I already understood what my commitment to “creating the curriculum” is [...] I also realized that the school is progressing in several processes, although we don't know that we are doing the curriculum. (Interview teacher 2)*

This kind of statements shows that by means of a dialogic process the relation between the teachers and the field of curricular studies can be addressed differently. As suggested by Vilanova, García and Señorino (2007), identifying the teachers' conceptualizations of their task through educative experiences –in case of the course, the concept of curriculum and its relation to pedagogy- generates opportunities to improve the educative processes under their charge.

Finally, to close this category, these two fragments of interviews express the perception of the teachers about the role of the University in this process:

*This training has something important: follow-up. There is continuousness and follow-up of what happened. Normally you take a course, it is over, and that's it. However, being in this course means that there is permanent evaluation of the contributions of the course, our suggestions, what can be done in a better way... That is important for me as a teacher because I feel that what I say matters and this is not usual. (Interview teacher 3)*

*What we did at school was that we started to operate; and the problem we've had is bringing together the conceptual aspects and the practical aspects, which was what you did in Los Andes University: bringing together theory and practice, which requires a dialogue between the academy and what I do, and it is supported by theory. It was fundamental to get to know the main document; it was very important because I found that we are going in a different way. One thing is what the theory says and the objective of the program and a different one is when you start doing it (...) I sent the document to other teachers in my school but sending it by e-mail for them to read it whenever they have the time is different from having participated in the course. I had never worked in Los Andes and now I think I have this support to continue working in my school. (Interview teacher 2)*

Legitimation is associated to power relationships and if participation is not legitimated, it is not empowering (Leave & Wenger, 1991). Thus, these two interventions have in common the fundamental role of Universities in the Colombian educative system of contributing to the legitimation of teachers by listening to them, validating their contributions, recognizing their needs and finding strategies to meet them. Considering that it was the Colombian members of the academy and universities who have generated the conceptual rupture between curriculum and pedagogy (Montoya, 2014), universities are partly responsible for having disempowered teachers by undermining their relation with the curriculum. Consequently, it is the members of the academy who must foster a change. This course is clearly an alternative to make this change.

The results presented in this category evidenced the importance of the proposal of a large group of international academics on re-conceptualizing the field of curricular studies as comprehensive leaving the vision of prescription (Pinar, 2014). In addition,



they show that the idea of the curricular design with a critical perspective (Posner, 1995, & Montoya, 2008) empowers the teachers and leads them to take responsibility for the construction of knowledge and identity and in turn provides ways of participation to develop specific actions for this purpose. This learning experience showed them that the view of the curriculum is related to specific pedagogical practices, as suggested by Doyle (1992). In this way, they could explore and analyze their own practice in a more reflexive way, establishing a positive environment, even in the moments when they were discussing unsettling points or institutional tensions.

### Perceptions of the lessons learned in the course

From a socio-cultural perspective of learning, the connection between knowing and being is fundamental. In this sense, the course intended to give the participants an experience that could make this connection true. Several lessons were learned in relation to the critical analysis of the influence of the curriculum in the educative practices:

*From the first sessions there were activities that clarified my view of the curriculum. I learned that it must comprise in a planned manner all the experiences of the students, so as to guarantee a meaningful learning in the class.*

*What I have learned until today is that the quality of education does not depend on how much we “teach” our students or how much we transfer to them, but on the way we do it so they are able to create a high self-esteem, self-confidence, self-respect and respect for those around them.*

*I have reinforced the concepts I had about the curriculum and learned from new experiences that nourish my teaching: the importance of the team in the construction of knowledge importantly promotes interaction between the students. The experience lived so far gives me new perspectives for my teaching tasks with quality. (Participations in portfolio)*

*The meetings were meaningful and served several purposes; one of them was appropriating everything in relation to the curriculum, excellence and academic training. In other words, being able to appropriate its intentions, led me -as coordinator- to recognize the needs in our school and being able to connect with work mates that have much more experience in the subject. (Interview Teacher 4)*

These lessons learned show the appropriation of conceptual elements in particular contexts and how pedagogical practices are closely related to the curriculum, as suggested by Doyle (1992). Furthermore, there is an evident expansion of the concept of curriculum and acknowledgement about the main role of teachers in curricular restructuring and transformation of pedagogical practices, as proposed by Stenhouse (1984) and Elliott (1993). These two understandings were fundamental throughout the training process and indispensable in the curricular reform intended by the 40x40 Curriculum for Academic Excellence and Comprehensive Education.

In relation to content, the hidden curriculum was the most mentioned and object of confrontation and reflection. The teachers were able to recognize elements from their beliefs and actions that influence their practice inside and outside the classroom:

*After reading the text, in my personal case many questions arise regarding these actions that I perform daily and the impact that they have on my students, especially considering they are in 1st grade and their teacher is their raw model; they actually copy from me many of my actions and expressions. Before I read this, I thought this course about the curriculum was important but my concern was not as evident as it is now. Now I question myself, I demand myself even more as a teacher, aware of the power of my attitude, my action and of the possibility of generating in my students a*



*critical view of their context, of what happens in their classroom, in their school, in their neighborhood, until they come to what is happening in their country and how all this affects their lives and their parents' lives.*

*I have had experiences in which aspects of the hidden curriculum have become evident in relation to gender. For instance, in physical education activities, rounds and dances in which it is considered that boys or girls cannot move in certain ways or make couples with children from their same gender, in topics related to identifying tastes, professions, occupations. I work with 5-year-old children. In my work I can see the hidden curriculum in relation to gender when guiding the recognition of the value of human beings in respect, equality, regardless of being male or female or of the distorted gender identity created by society or culture. (Participations in portfolio)*

In this sense, expanding the understanding of the curriculum led to assuming certain positions and perceiving themselves differently. Moreover, it promotes the development of the transversal pillars of the policy in relation to gender, inclusion and diversity, which required greater awareness of the role of school in the transformation of values, beliefs and relations.

When the curriculum is not conceived as an enemy but as an empowering construction, teachers are much more proactive and willing to change their practices. For example, many of the answers to open questions in the final survey showed that the student-teachers had taken their learning experiences to their own schools:

*I have practiced methodologies that we worked in the course, such as the group of experts, and included the orientations in different areas. I have taken into account collaborative work in the classroom, in addition to the advice given to generate debate and evaluation.*

*In addition to reconsidering the center of interest that I guide, I have thought about the methodology that I use in my classes, about how I can make it more dynamic. (Final surveys)*

Furthermore, 88.57% of the teachers that answered the survey stated that the course contributed to their teacher training. In the portfolios the student-teachers manifested that the activities proposed were quite interesting because they were innovative and enriching in the sense they provided specific strategies to think in curricula that are not centered in contents but also address skills and competences:

*I valued the importance of group work in workshops as the creation of a tower with spaghetti, in which each one cooperated actively to attain a common objective. I learned the structure and operation of cooperative teams and the importance of developing collaborative skills (decision making, communication, conflict resolution) to perform the assigned tasks efficiently.*

*The strategy of collaborative reading has become an excellent tool for the analysis of texts and their understanding; with practice, we have improved in its use and found more fluidity in its application. Among other aspects it helps to focus the attention and do a comprehensive reading of texts; we improved timing and by sharing with someone else we met the objective of building knowledge. (Participations in portfolio)*

These testimonials illustrate how meaningful experiences in training processes provide elements to the teachers to re-structure their designs and implementations in their everyday learning environments.

## **Final reflections and conclusions**

The perceptions of teachers about the course also reflect the challenges in the initial teacher trainings in Colombia, regarding the curricular studies, as expounded by



Montoya (2014). Despite the curricular autonomy attained in the country according to the documents, teachers actually have no power on the curriculum because they do not know it. This is the source of conflicts when it comes to the demands for the implementation of new policies such as the 40x40 Curriculum for Academic Excellence and Comprehensive Training. In this sense, the results of this study show that the course designed shows some divergences and convergences of the curricular realities faced by teachers in institutions. Among the tensions were identified, in addition to the new demands that students and teachers generate to the institutional curriculum, the difficulty to make decisions in relation to the curriculum change. Within the convergences, the results show that the designed course is a pertinent and suitable strategy for the diffusion and appropriation of the policy documents.

In particular, the course structured under a curricular and pedagogical view different from the one the teachers had abstracted, generated an environment that they defined as pleasant, kind and respectful. This setting favored deep discussions throughout the course in relation to the concept of curriculum and showed them that it is not necessarily opposed to pedagogy.

When teachers experienced views like that of the concurrent curriculums proposed by Posner (1995) in their everyday life, they could see the comprehensive power of a more complex view of the curriculum. Likewise, they realized that they could take many of the pedagogical practices they learned to their own teaching practice. These two specific actions generated transformation and empowerment in relation to the curriculum and the public policy, as well as the awareness of their responsibility as builders of a curriculum aimed at including the strategic pillars, more participative practices and new spaces and actors that mean greater learning opportunities for children and youngsters in Bogota.

Finally, it is important to recognize the conflicts and resistance expressed by this group of teachers, generated in the poor conceptualization they have of curricular affairs, and how this fact disempowers them in their task. This experience shows how Colombian universities have a great responsibility in leading processes that help the educative community to build a new comprehension of the relation between curriculum and pedagogy to favor the autonomy required by education in the country.

## Notes

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