

Dialogues and Circumstances as Unavoidable Topics in Curriculum Field

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Introduction

The twenty-first century offers a new twist for curriculum field. Basting its theses, may be able to put forward new ways to live the international with the particularities of the local. For this, it turns to the dialogues and conversations as articulating metaphors between different contexts. Curriculum as a *complicated conversation* (Pinar, 2006, 2011b, 2012) means a double cross into stories and politics, between the local or national and the international. It has demonstrated the constitutive tension in the field of curriculum theory. The complicated conversation is the intention to compile the curriculum state of situation in different nations, their particularities, the subjective and trends. It is important to recognize the territory as the discursive surface where curriculum over-determinates. Therefore, it refers to treat emergence, identity, alterity, allegory, internationalization, decolonization, cosmopolitanism, individuality, inwardness and also *Bildung* (Pinar, 2011b, 2015), as he explains:

That conversation with others is complicated by the fact of our, and their, individuality, their differing generational, genetic, and cultural locations. It seems we share experience but that experience is always inflected by these separate locations, in historical time and geographical place, and by our distinctive experience of these. The reverberating fact that we are each individual—however differently—separates us from each other, but it is also what connects us to each other. (2011b, p.5)

However, taking the challenges to curriculum studies, the curriculum notion enters in discursive frame where its floating signifier (Laclau, 1990; Laclau and Mouffe, 2010) makes an ambiguous and polysemic work. That is why, when curriculum refers to conversations² and dialogues identifies the discourse as a main category of analysis, for understanding practices, theoretical constructions and the subjectivities of its speakers. Discourse identifies curriculum like a social event, and considers it as a signifier politically and cultural involved. As a floating signifier, provides senses that printed in the *language-game* of the later Wittgenstein³. Likewise, to refer to dialogues includes culture, identity, subject, difference and antagonism. Without forget discussions about hegemony and emancipation, as politics categories for the curriculum.

The special feature of this scenario is evidenced by the philosophical rupture at the end of the twentieth century between modernity and postmodernism. This also sharpens intellectual scene for curricular theories but that does not mean aggravation or



TO CITE THIS ARTICLE PLEASE INCLUDE ALL OF THE FOLLOWING DETAILS:

Morelli, Silvia (2017). Dialogues and Circumstances as Unavoidable Topics in Curriculum Field.

Transnational Curriculum Inquiry 14 (1-2) <http://nitinat.library.ubc.ca/ojs/index.php/tci> <access date>

collapse. A new perspective in curriculum studies is emerging. Consider the rupture between modern curriculum discourse (content by Tyler Rationale, *The Practical and Critical Theories*) and post-critical discourses, charts the crisis of a curricular area that continues demonstrating its presence in the field of education, emphasizing the depletion of the modern perspectives. Now also, the differences between modern age and the post-critical theoretical show that disagreements in the curriculum field are necessary for its intellectual growth. Far from marking dissonance, it has theoretical richness and epistemological maturity. This disagreement breaks with the hegemony of its field during the twentieth century, and establishes differences, equivalences and articulations with signified in postmodern scenes.

It is important to make studies that address problems, paradigms and authors who behave towards the field of curriculum today, making them visible. Works of this type are manifested in International Curriculum Studies, by William F. Pinar, with his *International Handbook of Curriculum Research* (2003b, 2014) and his other collection *Curriculum Studies ... Intellectual Histories, Present Circumstances* (2011a, 2011c). There are also the work by Eero Ropo and Tero Autio (2009) *International Conversations on Curriculum Studies. Subject, Society and Curriculum*. Latin American curriculum studies share that concern taking place of these productions. Underlining Latin American specifically contributions there are two important works. First edited by Alice Casimiro Lopes and Alicia de Alba (2014) *Diálogos curriculares entre Brasil e México*; Alicia de Alba and Alice Casimiro Lopes (2015) *Diálogos curriculares entre México y Brasil*; and second, edited by Ángel Díaz Barriga and José María García Garduño (2014) entitled *Desarrollo del curriculum en América Latina. Experiencia de diez países*.

Referring to unavoidable topics is, without any question, referring to those subjects, which cannot be evaded, dodged or go unnoticed in the current situation regarding the curriculum field in Latin America. I understand that the unavoidability lies in the event shapes between *dialogues and circumstances* which, as a meeting point, generates a change of direction. What is unavoidable then, in this case, is the academic discourse, which generates tension in the critical theories' paradigms and their postmodern evolution framed in the curriculum-society relationship (de Alba, 2007a, 2009). Until this moment, the Latin American curriculum presents events in the dialogues between Lopes and de Alba (2014), de Alba and Lopes (2015), between Díaz Barriga and García Garduño (2014) with ten Latin American countries, or when Pinar (2011a, 2011c) mediates in the curriculum studies in Mexico or Brazil. This dialogues and circumstances officiate as metaphors, which make visible the discourse markers of what happens in the curriculum field in a post-critical period. Some unavoidable topics that become conceptual nubs which's patterns contain notions, genealogies and subjects are: (1) the consolidation of the field and a greater socialization of its state of arts, (2) the consideration of the tension between critical and post-critical theories, (3) the complementary relation Curriculum and/or Didactics and (4) political and epistemological debates about curriculum inquiry from those new perspectives.

Genealogy and Consolidation of the field

To create the Latin American curriculum discourse mapping, includes academicians, productions, perspectives and institutions. Foucault's dispositive notion says that each artifact has its own regime of lightness allowing visibility for some events and hiding others. Building this mapping through a dispositive is only a kind of discourse, especially when it is referring to a theoretical object as ambiguous as the curriculum is.



The unavoidable contributes to a process of consolidation of the field and simultaneously reveals an epistemological imperative towards a greater socialization and movement of the state of the art relating to the local production in the area. While seeking for meeting points, identity and differentiation is granted. In itself, placing the regional under suspicion enables the deconstruction of its meaning. What constitutes the regional in Latin America? How are these regions identified? As Wittgenstein (1967 [1953]) says, which is the *family resemblance*? What makes each region unique in the curriculum notion?

In the case of Brazil, it is located in the early fifties and for the rest of these states, concerned in mid-sixties and seventies. That common trait among countries, make them to share the arrival of the curriculum thought technical perspective represented by Tyler mainly from his work *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*. In Díaz Barriga and García Garduño (2014), a state of art and historical reflections on the curriculum in their countries are presented. Footprints are repeated as they were traced with others that were designed in the particularities and differences. Each of the ten essays reconstructs the political scenario in which income is given to curricular problems playing a game between presidents, ministers of education and academicians as political subject. There are few works about the state of affairs of the curriculum studies in Latin America. Studies like this are very important to make the curriculum studies perspective goes on in our continent. Including every one that refers to dialogues and conversation as metaphor about the internationalization, speaks together in language-game. Only from this perspective, contextualized in the tension between modernity and the postmodern, local and global, begins the field of curriculum studied as stories of hegemony, over-determination and subjects in every country. Curriculum as a field of study was born in modernity. Currently eludes modern ties and looks for theoretical horizons that include diversity, (auto) biographical stories, narratives and memories, but also a new definition of democracy. The theoretical curriculum mapping is assembled in the present with patches of different regions. Neither obeys the imperative of coincidence, nor imports Anglo-Saxon-American models. With genealogical brands, each Latin American country builds its own story concerning curriculum. As every author do in Díaz Barriga and García Garduño work, each academician tells his or her own story about Latin American curriculum discourse that takes, in the best of cases, six decades of political and cultural faith. Their passage is forced to look ahead of the field producing genuine speeches that reflect Latin American reality. This essential and necessary kind of study is due among intellectuals of this continent's latitude, install alternatives educational stories to the Tyler Rationale. Post-critical analysis must flood and fills up pages of futures essays. Curriculum research in Latin America should grow with the mixture of actual post-critical analysis coming back to the past. The stories, the ways of interpreting, the way of visibility events, realize the Latin American kaleidoscope sharing similarities and differences from the past, to the present. *Latin American* is a hybrid construction designed by crossbreeding that keeps tension between individual identities and common cultures.

Critical and Postcritical Theory

The ethical and political commitment to ensure continuity of curriculum theory obliges us to consider the passage from critical theory, sealed corollary of modernity, to postcritical curriculum theories. As a hybrid and complementary construction, there are post-structural, postmodern, non-essential and postcolonial theories (Lopes, 2013). In the case of Latin America, there are noteworthy contributions from Discourse Theory of Laclau and Mouffe (2010) Laclau (1990, 2008) and Mouffe's political theory (2009,



2012, 2014) in the social sciences⁴. In addition, there are productions of Lopes (2011a, 2011b, 2013, 2014), Macedo (2011, 2014) and de Alba (2007a, 2007b, 2009, 2011, 2014) as the most outstanding. Analyzing curricular genealogy in those texts the culture, politic, society and the subject are the main important issue. In addition, they converge into discourse like a nodal signifier that is helped by poststructuralism and deconstruction. The postcolonial studies contribute to the gender, subjectivity and cultures. While the postmodern allow study the curriculum from the philosophical discourse rupture between modernity and postmodernism. This debate occurred between Habermas and Lyotard in the early eighties⁵. These perspectives continue to regard politics as an important factor in the curriculum. It lies not only in analyzes of hegemony and power, but also hope to build a democratic horizon which contains diversity and conflict. In this analysis, Mouffe (2009, 2014) provides a framework for rethinking the political that can be taken for the curriculum theory.

Assuming that, as an intellectual field, the curriculum should be thought as in tension between the critical theories and the postcritical theories questioning its affiliation with politics, discourse, the social conditions and minorities. In this way, it breaks away from the widespread perceptions of the modern age, of which the curriculum is an important part. Having said that, the challenge of this field includes separating from the Anglo-American hegemony with the purpose of creating genuine productions that highlight the curriculum's relationship with the social demands, generating discourse around the curricular policy. Not to recognize an epicenter in the curriculum discourses favors the recognition of constellations of authors, topics-issues and epistemological perspectives.

Seeing from this perspective, the work of Alice Casimiro Lopes and Elizabeth Macedo in Brazil understand the curriculum as cultural enunciation (Macedo, 2011) and the hybrid characteristic of the curriculum field (Lopes, 2011b). They go to poststructuralism, analyzing curriculum in politics context. In their texts, the curriculum is crossing disciplinary borders, boarding its cultural and political character. They refer curriculum to a discursive perspective understanding it through Derrida, Laclau and Mouffe contributions. Dialoguing with them, Alicia de Alba goes to non-essential perspective analyzing tension between globalization and, as she called, Generalized Structural Crisis (de Alba, 2007a, 2011). Looking at the international dialogue for curriculum field in the twenty-first century, she says:

The internationalization of curriculum studies is a historical imperative linked, then, among other things, to understanding the curriculum-society relation in a significant and productive way, forefronting the strong cultural specificity that is lived out regionally in the world. Especially in Central Europe, the United States and England, there is as well a balkanization of subjectivities and identities reflected in the curriculum field at the global, local, and the “glocal” levels, illustrated not only by the complexity of communication across national borders but also by the difficulty of achieving meaningful communication between different generations within nations. (2011, p. 59)

From other point of view, Díaz Barriga and García Garduño (2014) considering the curriculum in ten Latin American countries as Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Uruguay and Mexico. There are stories that make the connection between the curriculum and educative system in these states. In addition, there are speeches that sometimes overlap problems and others rescue their different curriculum histories of each particular country. While they are



making their experience, they show the constitutive hybridity of the curriculum field. Every study of this subject deals with various curriculum theoretical perspectives, either as an object of educational policies or as intellectual field. In the mixture of tension between political definitions and university experiences of Educational Sciences courses, a common thread runs through them at the beginning: the determination of the imperatives from United States about the meaning of curriculum and its pragmatic distribution of curriculum models along the Latin American countries⁶. This shows that curriculum was an object for the hegemony and politics determination. US strategy had been used curriculum like a dispositive of social control to Latin American education. Making refer to curriculum studies in Mexico (Pinar, 2011a, Kumar, 2011, Díaz Barriga, 2011). Kumar says:

Significantly, the adoption of aforementioned US scholar's work during the 1970s which had been published in the United States between late 1940s and 1960s was also an intentional political act. It coincided with a US strategy to counteract the Cuban communist revolution, which threatened to spread throughout Latin America. This containment strategy was conducted through the Alliance for Progress, President John F. Kennedy's initiative for US "cooperation" with Latin America in the early 1960s. (Kumar, 2011, p.31)

An ethical imperative reminds us that the curriculum cannot avoid being treated as a political text. That is to say continuing the critical theories' job regarding the relationship between curriculum and power, ideology and hegemony developing new meanings for analysis categories such as emancipation, democracy, government and autonomy. The recursive neoliberal scenarios that cyclically haunt Latin America show, once again, the relationship between the curriculum and the education policy. As a nodal signifier in the Latin American neoliberal discourse, the assessment becomes a meeting point between the global-local tensions. There, the contributions of curricular conceptual frameworks cooperate in the genuine development in terms of assessment, while, at the same time, place its relevance under suspicion.

Curriculum and Didaktik

The recovery of its relationship with didaktik is another unavoidable task. This recovery goes back to the initial years of the 1970s, in Argentinian Barco's so-called "new" or "anti-didaktik" (1973) or, both Argentinian too, Edelstein and Rodríguez debates (1974), which took account of another horizon for education and the teaching role in Latin America. However, the relationship between curriculum theory and didaktik tradition reaches also the untranslatable sense of Bildung as that signifier which far from becoming empty (Laclau, 1996) deserves to be studied again. Curriculum-didaktik as a complementary relationship. A complex relationship that generates tensions, antagonisms and disruptions, which are shared in an articulated manner by education and the teaching role as privileged objects. This complementary relationship share teaching as the main object and its relation between teachers and content. Considering Shulman (1986)'s questions and his *missing paradigm*, I formulate onether ones: why is teaching a content-free domain? If it is a problem of curriculum and didaktik, what can we do with these dissociated fields of study, which need to keep coexisting in the same environment? (Morelli, 2016). Moreover, I continued with other questions like what happens to the teacher when teaching? What are the sources of knowledge used by a teacher when teaching? What does a teacher know about the contents taught and how this teacher continues to acquire knowledge on that subject



matter? Moreover, what is the previous knowledge possessed by a teacher regarding the content development as a didaktik issue? (Shuman, 1986, p.8). These are many questions but there are very few answers which impact in the planning and development of teaching as teachers' professionalism.

Teaching and Bildung are connected in didaktik tradition and Bildung helps to define teaching in its. For much of the twentieth century the Anglo-American curriculum was dissociated from the German tradition of didaktik. Authors such as Westbury, Hopmann and Riquarts (2000), Autio (2006, 2016), Pinar (2011b) focus on this subject as a field that presents different traditions that share inseparable objects and problems from the internationalization of curriculum studies. Also, Uljens and Ylimaki (2016, p. 19) say that "it is a dialogue moving across disciplines and fields of research, between epistemological schools and research methodologies, and between traditions in different countries and continents. Needless to say, such an attempt is a challenging undertaking".

Following the idea related to instruction, Pinar (2011b, p. 63) retrieves from Hopmann and Riquarts a list of 3 elements of didaktik that "requires knowing (1) the content of instruction, (2) from where that content comes, and (3) how content is used". In my opinion, teaching is a complex activity, guided by the teacher, which is based on creating situations in which student meets with knowledge. Teaching is an intentional act that seeks specific purposes in the transmission of some knowledge to some students. That is why is so important even for curriculum and didaktik to take care of that matter where the transmission of cultures is at stake. It is important to stress that, although teaching is developed in the classroom and the teacher is the one in charge of its outline and development, it does not belong to the classroom unit exclusively, but also to the institutional one. It is at the micro-level where the selection and sequencing of the guidelines that allow defining contents take place. It denotes the retrospective and prospective nature of teaching. The retrospective nature is connected with the historicity of classes and the possibility to recognize a past that is combined with a utopian view, which is typical of the political purpose of teaching. That is to say bringing past into the present in order to think about the future.

The special characteristic of teaching in the school environment is that the teacher never thinks of teaching in terms of a single student; the challenge is to make teaching compatible simultaneously between the whole group as social and their particularities. That is why among the indispensable topics in the current field of curriculum it becomes necessary to recover the didaktik's discourse, Bildung and teaching as a shared problem.

Curriculum Research

By enrolling in the social and human sciences, curriculum research results from the convergence of different disciplines and theoretical perspectives that provide qualitative approaches (Morelli, 2017). It still claims to be a part of the educational research ordering to consolidate paradigms, methods and problems derived from the curriculum-society relationship. Buenfil Burgos (2012, p, 51) already stated that "educational research is like any other social science and humanities and, therefore, it needs the theoretical work so as to open and refine the vision, and to offer better arguments for the knowledge produced." A field to achieve consolidation it requires that the logics regarding the knowledge production is recognized and socialized among its researchers. The curricular research forms intellectual bonds among the academic subjects and contrasts and transfers the treatment of social and epistemological problems, transformed into the objects under examination. In this regard, it is not



possible to avoid working on the socio-educational problems such as multiple literacy, teaching practices, the school class as a social group, the professor's intellectual identity and the gender studies, along with the continuity of the curriculum studies as that great arena in which its intellectual discourse is constructed.

Curricular research establishes the consolidation of the curriculum field while connecting it with educational practices and recognizes that much of that world called education contains curriculum marks. In recent times, the shift towards neoliberalism is once again becoming evident where the state takes a leading role by proposing educational reforms that install outcomes, assessment and testing. This makes curricular research more political and begins to focus studies on the social and cultural effects of curricular proposals based on standardization of teaching and learning. That is why research cooperates with the re-theorizing of the field (Uljens and Ylimaki, 2016), studying the relationship between curriculum, politics and policy.

Recent neoliberal educational and accountability policies have intensified a focus on school leadership, learning results, and national curriculum standards. The increased focus on leaderships occurs as parts of a new policies of curriculum making, leaderships as enacted practice, and evaluation as a steering vehicle, all of which are occurring amidst increasing global interdependencies among all societal sectors as well as increasing multiculturalism and rapid developments in communication technology re-defining spaces for learning and teaching. (Uljens and Ylimaki, 2016, pp.4-5)

For this, it is important to transcend the analysis between curricular levels and its interrelation as a problem of educational administration and bring it to the curricular policies analysis. Emphasizing that in democratic contexts the objective is to establish agreements between the interests manifested at the different levels while incorporating the analysis of cultural differences as a political conversation. Two approaches are made visible to this problem. On the one hand the study of “small narrative” and short story (Goodson, 2017) and on the other cosmopolitanism emphasizing the relationship between the state and the local. However, since this is a political problem, curricular research will focus on education for citizenship and social justice in the achievement of equity, participation and comprehensive education (Englund, 2016, p. XVI).

Non-final Considerations

In this essay, I have dealt with the unavoidable topics of the Latin American curriculum highlighting four key points such as the consolidation of the field and its genealogy, the tension between critical and postcritical perspectives, the relationship between curriculum studies and didactic tradition and curricular research. Considering that, these four denounce problems that the curriculum could not avoid to be treated in the present. This analysis installs an intellectual challenge putting at stake postcritical perspective. This is reflected by discourse theory and genealogy articulation. The sphere of philosophy allows recognition of subjects and culture and the curriculum-society relation in each scenario. These are constitutive issues in the curriculum studies discourses as an event.

Studying the curriculum at the beginning of the twenty-first century makes visible a concern. Referring to policy and the direction, that curriculum takes after the philosophical rupture with the modern thought. We are living at present time, analyzing curriculum conversations and dialogues while they are happening and arguing. We are



suffering the instability and fragility of its theses, the diversity of views, and treating it as epistemological field.

Once more, the ambiguity encroaches on the curriculum. Nevertheless, in this time, it is not to consider negative effects of been a polysemous and chaotic object. In diversity of the postmodern stage, many ways can be taken. By drawing common threads that weave paths for the curriculum and its connection with discourses, we get back to the political and culture. To relate the character of the curriculum, with politics and culture, is an act that link to language-game (Wittgenstein, 1967[1953]), disagreements and paralogy⁷ (Lyotard, 2004). It puts on relevant ways to relate, communicate and legitimize educative discourses.

After the modern twentieth century curriculum discourse, the current problem goes to the social-included subject, the tension between the non-existent universal and the particularities, the international and the local, the *subject* that goes beyond the *citizen*. Comparing nationality to citizenship, Autio (2009, pp.15-16) says that citizenship is no more unequivocally definable by nationality as a result of transnational processes. That is why he refers about cultural citizenship, ecological citizenship, technological citizenship, like new ways of being a citizen with new rights and responsibilities. In the consolidation of the field of curriculum regains the theses about interdisciplinary and relative consensus and it continues to maintain its social identity and its political nature. In short, curriculum in twenty-first century consists in dispute tinged with culture and subjectivity.

Notes

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² After the Second World Curriculum Studies in Tampere, Finland on May 2006, Eero Ropo synthesized enunciating the *curriculum as an international conversation*. See Ropo, E. (2009, pp. ix-x).

³ When Wittgenstein (1967 [1953], p.13) refers to language-game and argues that there is not only one relation between the significance and signifier. Even, the significance is determinate by the use given for its speakers, by the way and likeness more than for its name. He says:

We name things and then we can talk about them: can refer to them in talk. -As if what we did next were given with the mere act of naming. As if there were only one thing called "talking about a thing". Whereas in fact we do the most various things with our sentences. Think of exclamations alone, with their completely different functions.

Water!

Away!

Ow!

Help!

Fine!

No!

Are you inclined still to call these words "names of objects"?

⁴ Even though their productions are made in the field of social sciences, we should highlight this contribution to the field of curriculum.

⁵ On the occasion of accepting Adorno Prize in Frankfurt on September 1980, Habermas gave a speech titled "Modernity_ an Unfinished Project". With it, he starts answering to Lyotard's postmodern



condition. Since, he recognizes that has not abandoned this topic. As he says: this theme, disputed and multifaceted as it is, never lost its hold on me (Habermas, 2010, p.9).

⁶ As Ashwani Kumar (2011) says, Díaz Barriga argued that consolidated its political strategy, United States exported to Mexico their pragmatist pedagogy. This educational colonization takes place across all Latin American countries during the 1970s from Mexico to Argentina. In Kumar words:

In order to meet the demands of industrial modernization, the Mexican State imported technicist models of curriculum development from United States. Several agencies associated with the US government namely, International Agency for Development (AID), the Department of Education and Culture, and the Organization of American States (OAS) financed Spanish translations of more than 20 US books on curriculum development including the works of “traditionalist” in US curriculum studies, namely Eva Baker, Benjamin Bloom, Robert Gagné, James Popham, Hilda Taba and Ralph Tyler. These models were to guide new curriculum policies and programs. (2011, pp. 30-31)

See also Díaz Barriga, 2011, pp. 92-93.

⁷ Paralogy is postmodern science that deals with the investigation of instabilities. Countering to grand narrative, micro-narratives, also called small or local narratives remain the quintessential way to take the imaginative invention and science. In Lyotard’s work, the language-game denotes the multiplicity of communities of meaning, the innumerable and incommensurable separate systems in which meanings are produced and rules for their circulation are created.

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Submitted: November, 5th, 2017

Approved: December, 9th, 2017

