

The Young People as Subjects of the Curricular Overdetermination

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Introduction

The scenario that today is observed in the world is not encouraging for Mexico and Latin America. Wallerstein (2005, p. 192) locates in the “World revolution of the 68” the beginning of the loss of hegemony of the United States of America (in a non voluntary collaboration with the Soviet Union), which would take them to carry on diverse tricks and strategies to keep the power, although there is already a clear competition for such leadership (Europe and their search for Alliances, on one hand; China, Japan and Russia, on the other and, perhaps, timidly, Latin America, there in the far horizon). Many have been the signs of such situation, among others, black empowerment, all-out wars, intromission in affairs of state of other countries, and so on. The voices regarding this hegemonic loss are diverse: Jose Luis Sampedro (2013) even considered that the fall is not only of the USA but of the western culture; Octavio Ianni (2006) with the theories of globalization; and, from a very different angle, Arcand (1986) with his movie *The Decline of the American Empire*. These authors, among many others, hold the credit of putting together in the argument both the social situation and the individual circumstance.

When reading everyday the newspapers I find a red-top tabloid permanent since long ago. The social fabric was eroded and fractured and the official sources in Mexico report in the last 20 years about 100 000 deaths (a hundred thousand! In the fight against violence) among which the majority are young people between 12 and 29 years old. What happened? Where did the dream go? The social project?

In Mexico, globalization arises – it’s not developed – in 1982. At this time, diverse economic situations become visible for the population: the entrance of transnational companies to the country; the work, juridical and economic deregulation, among others; the opening of the market that has as an inaugural act the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement; the selling of over 50% of the Mexican mining companies; the affiliation to regional blocks; the change in oil dynamics, etc. All the Mexican social politics is modified by the eventual dismantling of the benefactor state and the change of emphasis from the social politics to the democratic. All the population sees how their quality of life goes down and just when they started to understand the previous changes appears the big change in educational politics, which is started in the nineties with many differences for all the educational levels but with a common link, the politics of an assessment state.

In this period, it becomes noticeable and –let’s say- that is located in the center of all the educational politics, the curriculum. Its protagonic role testifies the need of



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control by the state over a population that is not controlled anymore by the social politics and soon it will reach incredulity about democratic politics. While quietly the “state” curriculum slides through all the interstices of Mexican life. Pre-school, primary, secondary, high school, university and even postgraduate levels are in the pot of assessment, the artifact –device- that brings them together is the curriculum. So, I state that not only there is an evaluating policy from the state curriculum that, for all the effects, has turned into pragmatics of the everyday tasks in school. Then, I locate the curriculum as the center of the hegemonic logic and, therefore, as the element capable of eroding such logic.

In the educational area, specifically from the curriculum, what are we going to do? It’s a priority. What are we, teachers, intellectuals, the curriculum makers going to do? Excuse the naivety but I keep thinking that it’s the education, I am convinced that by educating is how we can fight, build, open horizons.

I highlight the Alicia De Alba’s words (2007) when she considers the crisis as a space of inedit possibilities and, citing Laclau and Mouffe (1987), emphasizes:

Here there is no place for disappointment...it’s a challenge for political imagination and creativity, [are] being constructed new emancipatory discourses, more humane, diverse and democratic...” (Laclau in De Alba (2007:125)

These words made me excited again and make me put a fence, a weak one but at least a fence, to hopelessness.

Alicia De Alba (2007) offers us a powerful theoretical category, the Generalized Structural Crisis (GSC). This category implies the general weakening of the elements of the relational systems and the deconstruction of the structures. In Bauman’s words (2004), the structures are historically constituted in pillars of the social and individual identity.

In our Mexico and, I guess, in a big part of Latin American countries, we observe the weakening of family structures (due to death or immigration or by penetration of the western culture...), the resounding disintegration of political systems and institutions and the increasing distrust of the population, just like the smearing of teaching and the decrease in credibility in the power of education to change people’s lives. Family, religion, politics and education as relational systems of the social structure in process of deconstruction.

From the standpoint of education, I can observe the emergence of certain glimpses of regional social projects, resulting some of them from the defeat of Latin American dictatorships. Other projects result from authoritarian systems in decadence or about to burst out. These glimpses I interpret as a necessity of a project, the aspiration to a necessary directionality and, I want (I truly want), to conceptualize them as one of the social contours that begin the “pulling” in the Latin American behavior. Retaking another of the contributions by Alicia De Alba I conceive this “pulling” as one of the social contours that according to our author “...are constituted through the diverse types of elements or features that, either are originated from the structures found in a process of rupture or arise in the same context of the crisis...” (2007, p. 106) like the Colombian or Mexican violence or like the organization of Mexican self-defense groups.

I can also see the conviction for a need of an educational project and here, the will of power and knowledge –from my perspective- nests and fertilizes the ground to



create innovative proposals that (although isolated) will have to take their place in the history of the curriculum in the region.

We want - from the standpoint of education and with the support of the theory - to impulse a movement that recognizes the curriculum as an opportunity to constitute itself into a device of power that achieves – in some moment - contends with and interpellates the curricular hegemonic logic. As a political space, the curriculum is based on a directed project and concrete political practices achieves to contingently generate conditions of higher social justice.

What would be those conditions that could be aroused and conferred, from the standpoint of the curriculum?

The object of this text is to reflect on the fact that if the young, assumed as a social contour, can be induced from the curricular work to impulse education as an element that, in the long run, will allow to reconstruct the social fabric.

Logic of the articulation and curriculum

What's curricular could be understood, analyzed and carried out from a standpoint of a logic that would articulate: a) the relationship we and they as constitutive of what's educational and, therefore of what's curricular. The constitution of human beings through the formation and identification of diverse pertinent, feasible and necessary positions of the subject, could be considered in the center of the analysis and the curricular tasks. b) always based on a consciousness, necessarily historical, about the "we", that "we" that recognizes the differences, that promotes diversity, that incorporates cultures and generates – preserves based on this recognition. The "we" around which, maybe, the Latin American curricular thinking (LACT) could be constituted. This is, the curricular experiences in our countries are still differences in a curricular discursive space where the curricular is the relational space of the Latin American educational structure. c) a relational space necessarily antagonized, confronted and strained by disagreements and alliances in which those that achieve to establish an equivalential chain based on excluding the other hegemonize, however, it turns the other into an adversary to avoid the erosion and further dislocation to reach the balance always precarious, always contingent. I am talking then about the political and the politics involved in what's curricular. In addition, here, as Alice Casimiro Lopes states (2015), equality and social justice would be the power ideas that are shown as the path to the curriculum. Therefore, proposing a curriculum (and its structure) depends on the contextual moment, the contingency. Its organization, then, will have to be necessarily temporary and the consciousness of it (to act in consequence) a constitutive condition. "Politics is the exercise of the decision that constitutes us as subjects" (Lopes, 2015, p. 50).

That said, in the same way of considering the logic of the articulation as an element that brings together the curricular with the political, educational, cultural and historical dimensions, emerges inevitably the epoch tension in which are "given-are" such dimensions, the tension globalization and GSC, we are in the Generalized Structural Crisis. The current Generalized Structural Crisis (De Alba, 2007), in tension with the economic globalization, today, after a little over 60 years of development, shows its consequences crudely: environmental imbalance and planetary stability to the edge; generalized poverty for the most part of the world and extreme poverty in the most distressed and diminished areas; decomposition of the social fabric based on the erosion –and dislocation in some- of the social pillars that had supported the modern world (family, education, religion, state) (Bauman, 2004); violence, narcotraffic, immigration and people trafficking, when not, war, ruin the everyday life. Alarming



context, difficult, dangerous and complex. This context in its gestation and development throughout 60 years has put social subjects in circumstances of increasing self-helplessness and vulnerability (Bauman, 2004), circumstances to which some respond with disbelief, others with fear, and some others with a defiant attitude like the young. This is the scenario in which we will have to give response to from and towards the curricular.

From the standpoint of this analysis the will of justice could be the signifier that interpellates us, contingently calls us to constitute the (LACT) as an equivalential chain capable of over determining or interpellating or eroding (at least) or dislocating (in the best of the cases) the educational and curricular hegemonic logic.

How to grasp the curriculum theoretically and practically in order to build it as a device of power? How to imbue the will of the common being?

The protagonists of the curricular game

It will have to be the subjects, more specifically, the identities to which respond and affiliate the subjects. Our subjects, teachers and students of the curricular realities in which we are found. Looking at the possible trajectories of the different positions of the subject, those we form and those we share the formative ideals with.

I would like to begin this section by retaking Villoro's statement (1993) about the figure of the world, which implies a collective assumption about beliefs and basic attitudes, ontological beliefs about the constitution of the being and the beings, epistemic assumptions about the reason that will have to be considered valid. All of them "...determine the way how in a historical lapsus, the world is configured before the man..." (1993, p. 1). I also retake the nexus that I perceive with the category of Episteme developed by Foucault in *Words and Things* (1966) and from which I want to remark the idea of configuration of ways of thinking that have given place to a certain conception of truth and of knowledge. On the other hand, I want to associate these ideas to the statement by Ulf P. Lundgren (1992) about the invisible curricular code, proper of the present time, which accounts for the inexistence of a clear formative ideal for the society. I want to point out that the category of curricular code surpasses the school, the scholarized educational institution, points to the educational vision of a society in a historical period.

I concur with Lundgren in that currently we could think about an invisible curricular code as an articulating element in the relationship curriculum-society, however, a paradox emerges immediately. How is it possible for the curriculum to be the center of the hegemonic educational logic, if according to Lundgren, it's invisible? What does such invisibility consist of? From my perspective it lies in the empty meaning regarding the kind of man the society wants to form, on one hand, on the other hand, the fact that the hegemonic educational logic ignores the feeling of the social being. As if our social being didn't know where we are going. And well, it is that way.

Being, World, Man, Truth, Knowledge, Formation, categories that emerge in the approaches made by Villoro, Foucault and Lundgren. Categories that, lead us to wonder is there a collective assumption about the world we want and a formative ideal regarding the man we want for this world? It's here where the why of the empty meaning of the curricular code is linked to the state curriculum as a device of power in the hegemonic educational logic.

What is then what the hegemonic curriculum – that of the competencies – transmits, projects, conforms? Ways of control but not features that involve a formative ideal for a wide social project social. Just like it's stated by Alicia De Alba in many of her texts, there isn't a wide social project, hence there isn't either a formative ideal or is



it the other way around? There isn't a wide social project because in the last 60 years the ideal has been lost and it hasn't been formed.

We are going through a turn in our beliefs says Villoro (1993:1) the figure of a world of the modern times begins to be an object of apprehension and doubt, philosophy itself questions its validity since the two concepts that are in the epistemic base of modernity are in doubt: subject and reason.

Villoro today tells us that the modern man, the subject, source of the sense of all things is losing himself. Maybe because it's divided, it's getting into a crisis at the same time as the modern historical reason. Not anymore the totalizing reason, not anymore the social megaprojects, the big narratives. Consequence of his failures, one of them the predation, exhaust and loss of their own habitat, the subject "subjected" to the consumer society and the failure of the socialist revolutions. Where to go now? Disenchantment or renewal? Villoro chooses renewal, Laclau rejects hopelessness, both shouts in favor of the reconstruction of the social fabric, therefore of the ideal, in a few words "to give history a new sense" (Villoro, 1993: 7), this is, to construct a new figure of the world. However, it alerts on the particular condition of Mexico regarding the fact that there are large sectors of the population that haven't even reached the modern ideal (autonomy and individual rights, natural and social world in a rational and human order) and they are stuck in irrationality and backwardness.

The tension globalization – generalized structural crisis in Mexico alludes a social, political and economical situation that shows an acute and polarized social inequity. "Inequity has increased in all the world in the last three decades, but Mexicans are advanced students in unequal distribution. The country is the second most inequitable of the 34 that integrate the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), only behind Chile regarding public politics. In the salary gap, it leads the way. The 10% of the best paid Mexican workers earn 30.5 times more than the 10% that earns less" (Siscar, 2015, p. 1).

The mythical ideal of México as the "Horn of abundance" for the Mexicans, the ideal of mexicanity built by the liberal Mexicans of the 19th century who proposed the mixed ancestry as a definition of the national identity (Aguirre, 2003) over the indigenous communities, the ideal that in some moment achieved to call the feeling of the collective subject is in crisis, as Maria Esther Aguirre Lora (2003) points it out. The founding myth, mexicanity, the nation state, begins to disaggregate not only in the economic aspect but, fundamentally, in the social imaginary. The school system and the curriculum have lost somewhere in the way of the 20th century their power to build the social myths about belonging to a nation "...scholarization as a practice of knowledge that constructs national imaginaries...in the measure that individuals imagine themselves as citizens..." (Popkewitz, in Schriewer, 2002, p. 227, in Aguirre, 2003, p. 302) has been fractured, for the moment, only some signs of routes – not all of them desirable- are observed in the horizon of our country.

I can identify three social features in our horizon: the movement of the youths, the political movement without party affiliation and the teachers' movement. It seems to us all of them are incipient, not institutionalized even if organized and with a character of being exterior to the sedimented social structure. All of them with the potential to erode and/or dislocate social institutions, alternatives to the founding myth of the nation. I am interested now in considering the young as a social contour.

At this point, I consider necessary the contributions that De Alba makes about the features and social contours. "[Social] Contours... are efforts to recover the necessary structurality of society, they are constituted as articulated spaces of signification" towards a horizon of future that pretends to be conformed as a wide



political social project (De Alba, 2007, p. 113-114). To what extent each of the situations that I mentioned can be considered as social contours?, I consider that two of them -at least- are building spaces of signification (young people and teachers), are also in search of a project, not clear yet because the thin thread that ties them is belligerence. We could consider that this space of signification is articulated by

(...) the confrontation between ontological-semiotic codes, in which is produced the general weakening of the elements, of the relational systems of different structures interrelated that at the same time constitute a structure or system of bigger signification, which leads to the proliferation of elements or floating signifiers. This is the weakening of the elements of the economic, political, social, cultural, educational, cognitive, ethical and other structures.... A generalized structural crisis characterized by the deconstruction of the structures, rather than the structuration of new structures, although in its interior complex phenomena of articulation like social contours are produced. (De Alba: 2007)

The educated or incorporated young people, as called by Reguillo (2000), that "...in front of the discourses of the global, can't and don't even want to be part of the mechanisms that promote diaspora and dispersion of the solidarity, of the communities and the cultures" (Zebadua-Carbonell, 2008, p. 51). However, it's not ignored that also exist the other young, the ones that haven't found institutional answers to their needs, which they have channeled in another way, and that have responded -or have been dragged- by discourses that interpellate them from delinquency and organized crime (Angulo and Barrios, 2013). Young people that, in front of inedit contingencies could conform a social contour as to equivalential chain in face of the social structure that marginalizes them.

Finally, I would like to consider that the Mexican social structure is constantly transformed and in imbalance, social identities don't achieve to be fully fixed (Laclau, 1987). The communities and families are in a reconfigurative process because of the strong population mobility. The young can constitute in some moment "...an «exterior» that blocks the identity of the «interior»..." (Laclau, 1990, p. 34). It blocks it in the measure that it is conformed - by imposition or by assumption- in the parameter, in the finality; the condition of its constitution is the imaginary that wants to be achieved as well as the means to achieve it "...the force that antagonizes me denies my identity in the strictest sense of the term" (Laclau, 1990, p. 34). The social space in which every time more there is a presence of popular demands that are becoming "but...the fact that these demands take place in the center of a society in which there were many other demands that were not satisfied...they went on to symbolize something that went beyond those demands, a popular identity..." (Laclau, 2005, p. 14). The unsatisfied demand is a mark of identity among the population and the young. The responding spirit and the derived movements are a constant.

The young as subjects of the curricular overdetermination

In this section I will consider the young as one of the subjects of the curricular determination and, maybe, as one of the subjects of the curricular overdetermination.

According to Laclau (2005), the unsatisfied demand is a mark of identity in the populations. The young, our Mexican young people have in their social property multiple unsatisfied demands, I could add that these demands are similar for an



important part of Latin American young people. Lastly, in this consideration arise two central concepts for reflection: identity and subject.

The young people, or, the youths cannot be characterized if not in relation to the adults, to the whole society. Understanding youth as a category of analysis, in the context of the curriculum, obligates us to “read it” as a series of differential identities (the incorporated young, the working young, the young called <Ninis>, the delinquent young, etcetera) that is required to understand in the core of its totality. Totality that marks a series of limits for youth. Limits that have led to exclusions (rejected from the educational system, without a job, in a state of suspension before they ARE something). In this game of equivalences and differences that self-recognition by young people as a social fraction without opportunities has been increasing throughout 50 years; and the division of the youths in impoverished and incorporated (Reguillo, 2000) allow me to distinguish today two features of a social contour that, every time more, appears in the already complex situation of the Mexican society, the young being established as a constitutive exterior (Angulo and Barrios, 2013). In this case, “The positions of the subject are necessarily articulated...but their links are contingent” (Buenfil, 2008, p. 119), this is, they appear in and depend on the social context. According to Rosa Nidia Buenfil what articulates the diverse positions of the subjects, of our subjects, the young, those, the incorporated ones and the ones that the educational system has disincorporated, implies: the antagonism “...by threatening my identity [the social structure] shows my contingency [young me]...” (Buenfil, 2008, p. 120), the unforeseen fight (#Yo soy 132, #Jornada global por Ayotzinapa, #Normalistas en...) and the conditions of existence. Those conditions will lead the young to diverse processes of identification before diverse interpellations in the pursuit of giving sense to their everyday tasks. The choice they make depends on their possibility of deciding,

(...) the decision is not necessarily nor exclusively rational, but it’s rather woven with passions...with the unconscious, it implies the choice of one among several possibilities [studies, work, organized crime, immigration, etcetera.] in a dislocated structure. (Buenfil, 2008, p. 122).

The youth as to objective of the formation in all the levels but, fundamentally, in higher education is the population which the curriculum must be conformed to.

We retake the notion of identity as to non fixed positions of the subject (Laclau and Mouffe, 1987, p. 133) in an articulation of the different positions of the same in the different social moments, this is, we think about the young in their different historical moments and the positions they have assumed; this is, all identity is assumed as relational. This identity is the one we are interested in considering in relation to the curriculum, particularly with the university curriculum. This is why I consider that the young from their historical conditions and their location in the social structure are the ones that can influence on the determination of the curricula, whether it is from a social positioning external to the educational system, or from a positioning inside the same. I locate them as subjects of the determination and the curricular overdetermination. I don’t discard, of course, the other subjects both internal (scholars, investigators, teachers, authorities) as well as external (professional societies, social institutions, etcetera.), I just pretend to point out the potentiality of young people as subjects of the overdetermination.

Identity is conceived as a “...system of differential positions [that constitute] a configuration...” in a given moment. We understand the articulation as every practice that is executed to set or dislocate certain identities in a search of structuration. “This



field of identities that never achieve to be fully fixed is the field of overdetermination” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1987, p.128). Our young, with their diverse positions move from one to another –and even go out of the young world- seeking to identify themselves, seeking to fix their identity. And the configuration of their identity –always precarious- by means of fixing any of the positions of the subject will depend on their decisions, the ones that will be made from a figure of the world, of man, of education and of future.

The curricular overdetermination assumed as a logic is related to identities (Perez, 2007, pp. 42-43-44) that promote or reject projects and processes of formation in the presence of antagonistic forces, instability in the borders that separate them and floating elements that interpellate them. The overdetermination, the trajectories and positions of the subject refer, then, to a question of limits in the groups and their organization, in the interactions and the communication, of course, between the identities and the differences. I could wonder if the diverse social groups (of the determination or the overdetermination) that influence the future of the youths (incorporated or not) have foreseen the extent of an educational policy (and its curricula) beyond the immediate.

Exclusion is, maybe, one of the most evident realities of the movement of limits fixed, removed or moved by the social structure in relation to young people. Management of the limits implies order, symbolic systems, classification, power, control and work division in social relationships. In a social system, according to Laclau and Mouffé (1987), the object of movement besides the dynamic proper of the system is contingency, the new and inedit that is presented in a sedimented structure; this element is recognized as a constitutive exterior and I consider that the element that is set as a constitutive exterior in the Mexican reality, and maybe the Latin American one, is the one conformed by the youths.

The rigidity or the contingency of the limits assumes inclusions and exclusions and conceptions of identity that come into tension. This is assumed as the establishment of relationships of force between agents of two or more groups that work in the same social space which is a field of forces whose movement allows individuals to fix a position and allows the field to transform. To what extent the young, the youths can come into play in the field of the curriculum?

The limits are cultural constructions that structure positions, differences, identities and value systems. By existing openings and closures of the relational systems and inclusions and exclusions of the agents or the events, what happens with the identity of these ones? In the beginning we visualize a fragmentation of the positions of the subject, in both the group it is part of (the youths) as well as the interior of its personality (the young person); fragmentation that is recognized as connatural to postmodernity.

In the described context we recognize, as a whole, the weakening of the limits, the sudden appearance of diverse and unutterable signs and meanings, the decentralization of the identities, new forms of identification, new imaginaries and the subject divided for himself and for the others. This way, the national, educational and personal identities, share the process of crisis present in the western civilization.

If the youths constitute a substantial space in the social structure and, today, in the context of the Generalized Structural Crisis can, or not, mean a radical change that makes possible the reconstruction of the social fabric or its destruction; young people become the social subject that can and must be taken care of, impacted and interpellated by the curriculum, understood as an alternative logic to the hegemonic logic that today permeates education.



As a wrap up

I have identified the youths as a social contour that in the frame of the Generalized Structural Crisis –from my perspective- could be articulated to redirect the Latin American agenda of curricular investigation in both the theoretical production as well as the design field and the curricular implementation.

The intentional articulation of this and other contours (for example, teaching professionals) could result, in the medium term, in a wide social political project shared by the most from the education standpoint. Project that could be fertilized from the curriculum.

Notes

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