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# The evolution in Spain of the theory and practice of curriculum

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The purpose of this report is to outline the evolution of curriculum theory and practice in Spain over the past twenty years. The report begins by explaining how technical curriculum perspectives were introduced in Spain during the 1970s. We then examine the effects of the introduction of democracy on curriculum theorizing. Finally we discuss some of the reasons for the failure of the curriculum innovations that were introduced by the Socialist government after 1982

## 1970-1980: the arrival of a technical perspective

In the 1950s, under the influence of the more technocratically minded members of Franco's government, a process of economic liberalization was started in Spain. As a result, the Franco Administration was reformed and a stabilisation plan was carried out which indicated the evolution that Spanish society was undergoing at that time. As Lerena (1980) and Puellas Benitez (1980) have pointed out, this process of evolution made it necessary to update the educational system which was still based on Moyano's Law which had been in operation since 1857.

In 1969, a new education White Book was published by the government which described the inadequacies of the educational system with respect to contemporary Spanish society. In 1970, a new Education Act was passed (LGE) which changed the educational system, so as to ensure its greater adaptation to prevailing social and economic needs. Among the changes introduced by this Act, was the publication of the 'Pedagogical Guidelines' which effectively translated traditional questions about the aims of education and its role in society from moral, religious and political ques-

tions into technical, ideologically-neutral questions. The intention behind this was to import the educational perspectives that were dominant in Anglo Saxon countries during the 1960s. However, as Varela (1983) has pointed out, the incorporation of these perspectives did not occur without contradictions which arose because the social and economic changes occurring at that time were not matched by any corresponding political change. Paradoxically, a technical perspective which affirmed the death of ideology was being introduced by a regime whose own catholic ideology was powerful enough to resist the influence of liberal attitudes.

However, it remains true that the tough hand of Franco's regime did not have the same force as during the post-war years. This change made it possible for alternative movements to emerge and contest the existing situation in different ways. Among these were the 'Movements for Pedagogical Renewal' which had a progressive background and, in most cases, a regional or national identity. These movements were critical of the so-called 'traditional schools' which they rejected as verbalistic, dogmatic, boring and detached from the lives and interests of children. The alternatives offered by these movements were based on a set of progressive ideas associated with what was referred to as the 'New School'.

With the emergence of the technical perspective, classical Spanish texts such as the works of P. Sarmiento, Manjou and St Thomas were left behind and the texts of Tyler (1973), Bloom (1971), Mager (1977), Taba (1974) and Gagne (1975) as well as those of Spanish authors such as Estanillas (1972) and Rodriguez Dieguez (1982) became the standard readings for Spanish teacher education.

But neither the official programmes of study nor the teachers enrolled on these

programmes followed the prescriptions of these new experts in curriculum planning. Moreover, although the ideology of the technical perspective was successfully imposed on the behaviour of teachers (to devise objectives, make plans, conduct evaluation and so on) it had a poor effect on practice because the material condition of teaching materials being produced were never favourable to turning teachers into perfect technicians.

What actually defined the ideology of the educational innovators who produced these materials was not the contemporary curriculum trend, but their opposition to the political regime. But, because of their lack of theoretical depth, these innovators were unable to detect the contradictions between progressive and technical forms of educational thought. As a result, the innovators uncritically adopted technical modes of discourse even though they sought to apply the pedagogical practices of progressivism.

#### 1980: the arrival of democracy

In 1975 the Dictator died. In 1977 the first freely elected government was formed. In 1980 a series of 'new reform programmes' were published and several research studies were conducted to renew others. In 1982, the Socialist party was elected under the slogan 'The Change' and the reform programmes were replaced by new ones. However, the existence of so many reform initiatives should be interpreted from the point of view of their political profitability. The new constitution of 1978 did not actually require many changes to the educational system and it was sufficient to re-describe the aims and content of the curriculum so as to make them appear more consistent with the new democratic way of life.

Although the reforms introduced by the previous government of the Democratic Centre Union party (UCD) endeavoured to introduce some curriculum changes, it was the Socialist party who took on the whole discourse of curriculum innovation and from 1983 onwards curriculum innovators were given the opportunity to transfer their proposals into official reforms. It is true that not many members of the 'Movements for Pedagogical Renewal' were directly involved with these reforms, but it is also true that many of their major representatives

went on to work on official projects and, in some cases, to occupy important positions.

The strategy of the Socialist government concerning these reforms operated in two ways. First, it aimed to replace the bureaucratic methods used to implement previous reforms by methods of open experimentation in which teachers were given a major role. Second, it focused teacher training on the 'Centros de Profesores' which drew its inspiration from the notion of the 'Teachers' Centre'. The first part of this strategy was designed to give official credibility to the ideas of innovators; the second to give groups of innovative teachers a place to conduct seminars and organize meetings.

In the academic world, criticisms of technical curriculum perspectives began to gain strength from the beginning of the 1980s. In 1982, the first Spanish book directed against the so-called 'objectives approach' to curriculum was published (Gimeno 1982). The classical authors who had originally articulated these criticisms, such as Schwab (1983) and Stenhouse (1984), were first read and then translated. Although there were not many university teachers who followed this trend, those who did received support from outside their own restricted academic circle. The Administration contributed to this support by supporting reform-training activities for teachers and university professors of didactics which rejected conservative pedagogies and were critical of technical trends. It was at this time that a significant number of teachers first heard of the hidden curriculum, didactic models of teaching, formative evaluation and action research.

With the arrival of democracy and with its consolidation by the new Socialist government, these new ways of thinking about the curriculum quickly spread. This does not mean that curriculum realities were changed since the gap between theoretical discourse and practical reality is not overcome simply by increasing the endeavour to explain the theory. What is also required is a change in practice—where practice is understood not simply in the restricted sense of 'a way of teaching' but in the broad sense of the material conditions which determine both the life of the curriculum and the lives of the teachers and students who are its protagonists. And these material conditions were not changed significantly by the democracy that replaced the dictatorship.

### 1990: the failure of curriculum innovations

During the 1989/90 school year a general debate is in progress about the curriculum design put forward by the Ministry of Education and Science (MEC 1989). Six years after the reform process commenced, the Ministry is now presenting curriculum proposals for discussion by the school community which draw their inspiration from the contribution of the psychopedagogue Cesar Coll to the Catalonian Autonomous Association in 1986, rather than from any experience of the reform process itself. This is largely due to the fact that the innovations that had been incorporated into the reform process do not satisfy the Administration's political need to present definite curriculum proposals or to make changes that do not exasperate many of the teachers in secondary and university education who, anxious to defend the content of their own disciplines, first expressed reservation and then were belligerent about the radical proposals that 'reformist teachers' were beginning to put forward.

The challenge of giving official recognition to the discourse and knowledge produced by the involved and committed teachers who adopted these alternative approaches to curriculum resulted in total failure. This was partly concealed by giving official recognition to some of these teachers by allowing them to remain involved in the reform process as advisers and coordinators. But neither the innovators involved in the reforms nor those who remained outside were able to discuss accurately the validity of their own proposals. In our opinion such incompetence has not been the result of an unwillingness to promote change but to a lack of concern with fundamental problems posed by education as a whole.

However, the Ministry not only trusted teachers for several years but also sought advice from curriculum experts who followed the progressive line. This happened just at the moment that these experts were incorporating the criticisms of the technical perspective and were moving towards its opposite, the 'practical' approach. Of course, this trend did not become operative at once. Rather, these experts, although they knew what should not be done, were still unable to articulate proposals that could provide guidance for the reform process as a whole. More than personal com-

mitment is needed if there is to be effective action against an Administration whose political ideology is generally supported.

When the Ministry began to realize the usefulness of the 'Curriculum Frame' designed by Coll (1986, 1987) for the Catalonian Administration, it was decided to make it the basis of an official proposal for the whole country. This usefulness derived as much from the practical way in which the proposal identified the elements and levels around which a curriculum design should be structured as from its authority as an official proposal. Coll presented his curriculum designs with an excellent definition and explanation of the constructivist theory of learning and a detailed analysis of the nature of curriculum studies or didactics. But in this, Coll only makes minor modifications to the technical model, substituting a behaviourist theory of learning for a constructivist theory. As a result, those who implement Coll's suggestions end up making proposals in the style of teaching by objectives. Perhaps we should also add 'teaching by content' since teaching and learning are taxonomized down to the last detail and activities are specified in accordance with the rudiments of constructivism.

Coll's model has been quite appropriate to the Administrations needs. But, as yet, it is not clear whether it is going to be used to draw up the terminal objectives of each curriculum area. Generally speaking, the Administration now employs a mode of discourse very different from the discourse of 1983 ('the teacher as protagonist', 'reform is not made with the Official Gazette', and so on). Indeed, all the signs suggest that the Administration is about to return to a reliance on technical guidelines, yet another indication of the exacerbated pragmatism which now informs socialist party policy in every field of economic, social and political life. And, of course, this means being in tune with liberal thinking, which is Spanish socialism's real and authentic contribution to change. The 'Curricular Basic Design' is to be discussed during the 1989/90 academic year and the legion of supervisors (a body which lost much of its power at the beginning of the socialist Administration) is already preparing to control the system in order to make it more efficient.

In 1985, the authors of this report began to think collaboratively about the meaning of 'Reform' in general. We have concluded that at present there is little to be done other

than denounce the intellectual, impropriety and personal opportunism displayed by many leading academic and curriculum experts (Rozada, Arrieta and Cascante 1980). We argue that the technical approach to reform could not be fully established in Spain during the 1970s because of the existing contradictions between an obsolete political regime and a social and economic system that was being developed along capitalist lines. Today, however, because the country is being governed in a way appropriate to an advanced capitalist system, such contradictions have vanished and the new reforms have settled down. In this situation the technical perspective is making its way in Spain led by those who could be called technocrats even though they obtain their legitimation under the banner of socialism.

Similarly, the number of university teachers who are now reviewing their scientific/technical ideas is growing but a willingness to accept new ideas does not always follow. Despite their self-criticism, the ways of thinking that academics have accepted during a good deal of their intellectual life cannot so easily be changed and more than one will end up doing the same thing as before but now in the name of 'action research'.

But despite this situation, we can also see signs of an opposite trend on the scene of Spanish curriculum reform which moves in that confused and undefined area between a pragmatic and a critical perspective. Because both these terms are often used in similar ways, those who are 'critical' of the new reforms tend to focus on their 'practical' inadequacies rather than their theoretical weaknesses. But the obstacles to understanding cannot be overcome by any integrated eclecticism of the 'critical' and the 'practical'. The only antidote against this is the strengthening of the dialectical thinking on which any truly critical perspective is based (Carr and Kemmis, 1988).

The authors of this report share a commitment to deepening dialectical materialism as a basis for a critique of the practice of education and to the thinking by which it is informed (Rozada, Cascante and Arrieta 1989). It is only by developing a dialectical theory of reform that we can develop a

theory of education and its practice that can transcend the gap which has not only existed under different names throughout the history of curriculum in Spain, but also throughout the history of theory and practice in general.

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