

Reflections around the Intercultural Approach in the National Curriculum Design

Presenta un análisis crítico del Diseño Curricular Nacional a partir de dos propósitos de la Educación Básica Regular, y reflexiona en torno a cuán intercultural es, más allá de los enunciados encontrados en la propuesta curricular al 2021. Sostiene que no es posible construir una propuesta intercultural si se mantienen enfoques en los que persiste un orden jerárquico y hegemónico de un conocimiento que subordina a los otros.

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At the beginning of March of this year, an Asháninka teacher, bilingual specialist in a Local Educational Management Unit (UGEL) in the jungle of the country, told me that she had found several notes of the intercultural approach and the bilingualism in the National Curriculum Design of Basic Education (DCN -2009). She had copied them in a file so that it can help her to support and defend her option for the Bilingual Intercultural Education approach (BIE) before their colleagues of UGEL. I asked her if the National Curriculum really seemed intercultural to her and she said that she could not affirm that it was without carrying out a deeper analysis of its different compo-

nents. However, she insisted that, for the moment, it could help her support the right of indigenous people to a bilingual intercultural education in a place where other officials continue considering BIE backwardness.

Although the bilingual specialist's position is reasonable, I consider it important to take a step ahead and reflect on how the BIE approach is really in the DCN. I claim that a perspective of a critical intercultural approach analyzes how certain ways to learn and interpret reality and invisibilize it are legitimized. It could be naive and even self-defeating consider a curriculum that claims respect to diversity by presenting scattered notes strategically located in different sections, while prioritizing a form of understanding and learning the reality that "makes us deaf in front of other ways of structuring the world" (MacCormack 1980: 21),



In this article, I outline some reflections on this topic. I will only consider two of the eleven “Purposes of Basic Education for 2021” given the length of this space. This exercise will allow me to go beyond the politically correct speech in favor of the BIE that the Ministry of Education has used throughout the last decade, and to identify in what extent it has kept its distance of the homogeneous paradigm that has characterized the education in Peru and in the continent.

Some statements regarding interculturality

The DCN has several notes on the human, cultural diversity and linguistics that characterize our country, and the necessity of an education that promotes knowledge and respect of diverse cultures. Its presentation is due to the necessity of an “inclusive, significant curriculum that responds to the socio cultural diversity and to the demands of the XXI”. Its introduction reaffirms this idea when pointing out that the DCN:

“ [...] promotes knowledge and respect of the diverse cultures of our country and of the world, recognizes the imperious necessity to transform the contact among cultures into an opportunity to learn and contribute from our particularities. It is necessary to exercise the intercultural practice by promoting intercultural dialogue, and recognizing the dynamism and permanent evolution of each culture” (MED, 2008: 11).

In the section referred to the organization of Basic Education, the DCN mentions the purposes of Peruvian education proposed in the article 9° of the General Law of Education:

“ To form people capable of achieving their ethical, intellectual, artistic, cultural, affective, physical, spiritual and religious realization, promoting the formation and consolidation of their identity and self-esteem and their appropriate and critic integration to society in order to exercise their citizenship in harmony with their environment, as well as the development of their capacities and abilities to connect their lives with the world of work and to confront the permanent changes in society and knowledge.”

“ To contribute to form a democratic, supportive, fair, inclusive, prosperous, tolerant society promoter of a culture of peace that affirms the national identity sustained in the cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity; overcomes poverty, promotes sustainable development of the country, and foments Latin American integration keeping in mind the challenges of a globalized world.”

This attention to diversity is repeated in the chapter referred to pedagogic principles. All these allusions to the social and cultural diversity of the country and others that I have not been able to mention for space lack are important and they demonstrate some advances in the educational discourse. However, we should remember that, as Walsh (2001) says:

“ [...] the problem is not simply to recognize plurality but also to decolonize (to politicize) knowledge because that helps structuring, legitimizing and justifying dominant power and subordination. This requires deconstructing structures of truth to the representations that reproduce and the power articulations within them, both in their local and universal ideologies. It is also required to incorporate alternative and diverse ways to create, produce and utilize “knowledge” when focusing our initial questions: What is knowledge? Whose knowledge?, Knowledge for what?, Knowledge for whom?.

Hegemonies discourse vs. Subordinate discourse

In addition, it is in fact regarding this point that we find gaps in the DCN. An evidence of the “colonized” vision of the knowledge that DCN maintains is in the explanation of the 11 principles that guide Peruvian education up to 2021 that Guerrero (2009) synthesizes in the following way:

“ In the 2021 all those who finish school will show a solid self-esteem and will dominate written language in full, in their mother tongue, Spanish and English; they will reason logically, handle problem solving methods and think scientifically; they will be critical young people capable of expressing their thoughts, feelings, opinions and interests exercising their civic rights; they will value the biodiversity of the country, demonstrating environmental awareness and risk-management skills, as well as productive, innovative and entrepreneur capacity, healthy habits of life, creativity, innovation capacity, appreciation and expression through arts, humanities and science. They will also dominate modern technologies of information and communication, mainly digital language.”

As Guerrero points it out, it is praiseworthy that the State intends tangible achievements that will have to be fulfilled in little more than one decade. However, from a BIE approach, open to the recognition and respect of different ways to understand reality and to learn it, it is necessary to meditate on how each purpose has been planned and sustained. I consider that this exercise is particularly important in the sense that, as the DCN points it out, the 11 purposes “translate the pedagogic intentions of the Peruvian educational system” and

“give it cohesion and guide the formation.” Moreover, it suggests that “the educational institutions at national level should guarantee [these purposes] in concrete results for society.” Although these statements take the 11 purposes for granted, I believe that they are perfectly debatable, as I explain next.

The first principle outlines the development of a personal, social and cultural identity under the framework of a democratic, intercultural and ethical society in Peru, and it recognizes the existence of different ways to think

and to interpret the world.¹ And even when this position could be considered as an important advance, when reading the other principles one realizes that recognizing this plurality of visions does not necessarily imply value them. This is very clear in the perspective that has guided the writing of the principles referred to understanding and acting in the world, and to the understanding of the environment and its diversity, just to mention two:

No se puede avanzar en la construcción de una propuesta intercultural si no se hace el esfuerzo por identificar los enfoques que siguen perpetuando un orden jerárquico, que acentúa el conocimiento hegemónico (científico occidental) y subordina a los “otros”, y si no se proponen alternativas frente a ellos.

“ Purpose 5: To develop mathematical thinking and, scientific and technological culture to understand and act in the world.”

“ Logical reasoning, learning of mathematical concepts, problem solving methods and scientific thought are key components for students who require a scientific and technological culture to understand the world and its transformations.”

“ Schools enhance intellectual skills for reasoning and investigation by means of mathematics, science and technology. It also offers students enriching experiences to develop their capacities and scientific attitudes, as well as acquiring applying scientific natural and technological knowledge, having mathematics as a formal science.”

¹ This recognition is also shown in the section “Characterization of the child in kindergarten education”, which states: “Let us not forget that the Andean and Amazon people’s thinking has been developed through an intimate interrelation with Nature. Their rationality in the handling and occupation of the space is different to the urban one. In Quechua and Aymara communities, for example, it is taught to live together with nature, the land is respected and it is essential for life, as it is the forest or the mountain for the Amazon” (MED, 2008: 60).

“ The development of mathematical thought and learning natural science contribute decisively to the setting and solution of problems of life” (MED, 2008: 25).

It would be necessary to wonder if one can consider the BIE approach a position that only recognizes the value of western science and does not show the existence of other ways to acquire knowledge and interpret reality. It would be also useful to know the relationship between this purpose and the idea that DCN “recognizes the imperious necessity to transform the contact among cultures into an opportunity to learn and to contribute from our particularities” (MED, 2008: 11).

“ Purpose 7: Understanding the natural environment and its diversity as well as developing an environmental awareness focuses on risk management and rational use of natural resources under a modern citizenship framework.”

“ It allows understanding nature from inquiring and investigating the complexity and transformations of our planet and the living creatures that inhabit it. All of which intended to preserve the balance among nature and society, natural resources and healthy spaces that allow sustainable development and the improvement of quality life now and in the future.”

“ Schools promote students to be curious, explore, ask questions, look for answers; to develop their capacity to analyze, meditate, innovate and evaluate the processes of nature, allowing them to generate explanations about the world based on knowledge and in their own observations and experiences.”

“ Reflective building of knowledge on interactions and social, ecological and geographical interrelationships that happen in local, regional, national and world contexts allows the development of an environmental awareness characterized by prevention and initiative attitudes, before, during and after disasters originated as a consequence of human action or as effects of natural processes. This capacity of risk management is a fundamental learning to develop environmental awareness.” (MED, 2008: 27).

Purpose 7 is based on the idea of nature as a resource given to humans that can be learnt thanks to scientific advances and exploited to achieve progress and development. This approach and the dualism men – nature deduced are, at the same time, core aspects of the pedagogic discourse in the DCN. However, this fractured vision of reality and instrumental of nature, opposes to a holistic vision that indigenous people have and it is against their vision of unity and mutual up bringing that founded their relationship with nature, as Rengifo y Oxa show:

“ Nature speaks, is alive and needs respect and love to be connected her harmoniously, not from a rationale perspective that sees her as a resource” (Oxa, 2008: 33).

“ The relationship with nature of the indigenous people is not confrontational but filial, and life perspective is based on a mutual relationship of up-bringing [...]” (Rengifo, 2004: 24).





Some pending challenges

With these examples, I wanted to put in evidence that it is not enough to include some positions in favor of social and cultural diversity, and statements referred to the existence of different visions of reality, to have a curriculum with a BIE approach. I sustain that one cannot advance in the construction of an intercultural proposal if one does not make the effort to identify the ideas that continue perpetuating a hierarchical order that accentuates the hegemonic thinking (western science) and subordinates the “others”, and if alternatives are not proposed. This implies an exhaustive and critical revision of the different sections and chapters of the DCN, and not only applying or adapting to local and regional contexts from the perspective of diversification². Before diversifying, it is necessary to introduce the BIE approach in the national curriculum (See Trapnell 2008). Diversifying supposes accepting the intentions of the official curriculum, and this is precisely the point that should be put in question from a BIE approach that demands, among other things, to open up to the existence of different ways of conceiving the world, learnings, knowledge and people. **!**

² Translator’s Note: Curricular diversification is a mechanism that local and regional educational offices use to apply and adopt the National Curriculum to their own contexts. However, many of these offices and schools follow the National Curriculum without any adaptations.

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