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The Reorganisation of the Curriculum in Educational Cycles in Codema College: A Positive Step

Abstract

The policy of reorganising schools in pedagogical cycles has been restored little by little in the state schools of the city of Bogota. This reform began in the year 2008 in Codema College, which faced a number of challenges, personal as much as institutional. The reform depended upon the participation and engagement of the educational community in the reform process, and for that reason, this paper presents a positive view of the school reorganisation in relation to the theme of cycles, to balance some of the views that have been expressed previously.

Keywords: reorganisation, curriculum, educational community

Introduction

During the last two government administrations of the city of Bogota education has been made a priority, starting from 2004 to 2008 with the regional plan, *Bogota without indifference*. This plan focused on concrete actions for school communities that addressed some of the problems facing schools: feeding the school children; better physical conditions for students; and thus optimising school performance. Later the reform moved on to reorganise schools in pedagogical cycles, which was one of the projects under the banner of the sectoral plan, *Quality education for a positive Bogota* (2008-2012), which was proposed as a response to the need to promote high education in the Capital District.

The order of priorities of the Sectoral Plan 2008-2012, *Quality education for a positive Bogota*, is clear, namely to improve the quality of education. To achieve this, certain actions were proposed that could turn the project into reality. These were to update the training programmes and to transform the school organization and teaching methods. All this was to fulfil the purpose of having excellent schools and well educated young people with respect of the values and principles of society.

In this sense, the Programme of Quality and Relevance of Education, had, as a fundamental intention, to transform educational institutions pedagogically, to change pedagogical practices and conceptions, in order to implement the programme, *Tools for the Life*, and to reorganise the curricula in educational cycles in the 370 schools of Bogota. This implies that the processes of education should centre on learning, recognising the peculiarities and needs of adolescents and young children during the

different stages of development, providing the conditions that facilitate access to knowledge in a holistic way.

The development of the process of curricular reorganisation

To stimulate the development of the process of curricular reorganisation in cycles, together with the programme of *Tools for Life*, the Secretary of Education of Bogota designed a methodological and conceptual plan that consisted of the following phases:

- I. Preparation: in which the proposal was discussed and awareness raised, and the conditions of time and space were created to initiate the support process;
- II. Formulation: in this phase all the processes in relation to the redesign of curricula in cycles was planned;
- III. Implementation: in this phase the processes planned in the formulation phase were executed; and
- IV. Follow-up and sustainability: during this phase actions were designed and executed that guaranteed the sustainability of the process of reorganising the curricula in educational cycles.

It is clear what was being attempted here, the Secretary of Education called on the educational community, and its response confirms the point made by Navarro: 'The implementation of educational policy is a complex task. It generally demands that numerous educational actors participate; central and local directors, students, supervisors, bureaucrats and parents or, at the very least, that they do not actively oppose. It is very important to take into account specific data on local conditions that affect the operation of the system. Concretely, to decide whether decision made centrally applies in practice to a certain locality is a far-reaching task' (Navarro, 2006, p. 12).

At this point, it is possible to affirm that Codema College, provides the case study for this paper, the development of this process of pedagogical and curricular construction could count upon the participation, the will, the autonomy and the educational commitment of the local directors of education, managers, and, in particular, teachers, students, and parents, which is to say the whole educational community. The work developed in the school began with concrete, collective agreements, which allowed for ownership of the process, and the gradual introduction of true pedagogical transformations.

It is relevant to note that, although today the balance of the implementation of the policy of cycles in Codema College is positive, in the beginning of the process there was disagreement on the part of the teachers. They were the first group called upon to own the process, and there was great confusion produced by their fear that this involved reframing their pedagogical practice and their educational functions, as well as modifying the principles of school organization that had existed since time immemorial. However, little by little, with the effective work on the part of working parties and the leadership of the process of adaptation, the attitude of the educational staff over the last three years has come together in such a way that today Codema College is one of the most advanced institutions in the locality in terms of the development of levels.

Process of collective consultation

To develop the processes of collective consultation during the promotion of this reform, it was necessary to create and to reinforce local and institutional organisations by for example, meetings with the teams, where the attending teachers were persuaded that their participation in the creation of a school environment that was relevant to their specific context, and which was the centre of many dynamic social relationships would be a positive step. While the curricula were being redesigned in cycles, higher education institutions and other educational institutions were contracted as consultants to support the school on site. This had the purpose of tying the academy into this process of transformation. The whole process took place under the leadership of the office of the Undersecretary for Quality and Relevance in the Secretariat of Education of Bogota. The Local Quality Team, the University de la Salle and the Academic Councils were all involved in the school, as well.

There were constant meetings between those who worked in the school and the academic advisors and consultants, where those who attended took part in the network engaged in reforming the curricula into cycles, and there was an interchange of ideas about local implementation. This resulted in the benefit that the teachers absorbed this new idea and took part in the process of construction in the school.

From the point of view of high quality education, the project of curricular reorganisation in educational cycles in Codema College took for granted, as a pedagogical principle, that centring the reorganisation on the stages of human development, and recognising the participants as integral human beings, with capacities, abilities and mastery that must be developed. This was essential for individual and social development and guarantees the quality of the educational outcome. This approach involved the whole school organization, trying to give responses to the daily questions, including: What to teach? How to teach? and How to evaluate? This was an open attempt to take into account the coherence of the socio-cultural context and the characteristics of the children and young people, in their different stages of development.

The reorganising of curricula in educational cycles

The reorganising of curricula in educational cycles is a different way to think, feel and operate the school. It organises the processes of education and learning from the perspective of valuing the young people, while offering the possibility of learning through pedagogical strategies that respond to their interests and needs and the demands of growth in the educational context (Ramirez, 2011). It would be useful to have some examples here of what pedagogical strategies were tried out and how they had changed from previous approaches.

This educational policy has made real and positive contributions to improving the conditions of life of the population, making education a democratic, participatory exercise of social development for each and every citizen. Consequently, the organization of education in cycles is a strategy to make a school more relevant to daily life, and has turned Codema College into a space of constant investigation and research, that has taken the reconstruction of the curriculum as an

area of research and participation, where the teachers and students become researchers and the object of research.

From this perspective, it is worth considering the work of Gajardo (2003) and his classification of the factors that have contributed to reducing school drop-out, and how Codema College demonstrates a good balance in the work that is being carried out:

- a) The increase in the pre-school enrolments, which has improved the success of children in the first years of primary and has reduced repetition, one of the main factors that affects early drop-out from school;
- b) The change to systems of automatic promotion during primary education, or at least the early years, which has reduced the number of over-age pupils, a factor strongly associated with school drop-out;
- c) The introduction, extension and, in some cases, better focusing of programmes and subsidies designed to improve school retention (scholarships, free school materials, programmes of school meals, and others);
- d) The improvement of the school infrastructure and the availability of quotas;
- e) The greater involvement of parents and the introduction of incentives to participate in activities of the school and following the school progress of their children, and of their results. This has led parents and the students themselves, to place a higher value on education as the single or main source of capital capable of improving their chances of access to urban employment (Gajardo, 2003, p. 2).

Up to now, we have looked favourably on the reorganisation of the school into cycles. Now we will explore the meaning of that reform in more depth so that it can be understood better. The Secretary of Education District (SED) adopted a programme that organises the school into five educational cycles, involving the redesign of the Institutional Study Plan (PEI) in their pedagogical and curricular organization, as well as its school organization and administration.

In Codema College a cycle is understood to be, 'the set of conditions and programmes, of intentions and strategies, of pedagogical and administrative resources, integrated and articulated with each other, so as to develop a time unit that includes several levels of difficulty, and within which the students can advance with more flexibility until reaching the objectives of the programme at the end of each cycle, which are linked to the aims of the education embodied in the General Law of Education' (Ministry of National Education, 2006, p. 5). Since 2008 this public policy has been implemented, and has demanded continual reflection on the state of educational practices, their characteristics, advances, difficulties and perspectives.

In line with this thinking, the main actions that have been undertaken in the institution are: the study of the sectoral plan for education, and specifically the pedagogical reorganisation in cycles; the implementation of phases 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the reorganisation in cycles; the evaluation of the students in relation to cycles; and, the adoption of specific projects for each cycle defining the character of the cycle (characteristics of the young people, and of the teachers). These actions guide the progression of the processes to develop the students in each cycle.

Pedagogical strategies have also been adopted to fit the cycles. Curricular guidelines orient the pedagogical process in the cycles. Socialisation into the educational community is integral to the cycles. The Institutional System of Evaluation (SIE) was adopted, following the guidelines of the Institutional Study Plan (PEI) for the reorganisation in cycles. Academic duties have been reorganised in line with the cycles, and the processes of academic and administrative support have been realigned with the cycles (Coordination by cycles).

There have also been adjustments to the school timetable, according to the introduction of cycles, involving the creation of official times for teachers' meetings, again organised by cycles, as well as the creation of local and institutional in-service training days, qualification and update of teachers through local meetings, courses, seminars, pedagogical days, and cycle meetings.

The implementation of pedagogical activities has reinforced the cycles, for example in terms of the pedagogical outcomes, team work and inter- and cross-disciplinary projects have been established. Curricular design is discussed in relation to cycles. The design of school and family support processes and improvement functions according to the dynamic that the reorganisation in cycles demands. The didactic discussion on trends, models and approaches is geared to the pedagogical reorganisation in cycles. The discussion on the organization of the education processes and learning by cycles has led to a rethink of the educational concepts on the part of the teachers, and also the students. This means that school dynamics revolve around the category of cycles in the institution.

In the processes discussed here, the school has depended on the continual support of the SED at a central and local level, with support of teachers and educational managers, and the coming together of the various organs of school government, including the Senior Management Team, Academic Council, Parents Association, as well as the Student Council. The process has also had the regular recommendations of the Commissions on Evaluation and Promotion.

Conclusions

The institutional effort has led to the reframing of many of the practices that, over the years, have constituted the daily routine of the school, and an educational ideal is being constructed that transforms education in the school, makes it possible to offer a high quality education that is relevant to the demands of the times and of the community, a human education where it is clear the young people are at the centre. This reminds us that, 'Before too much importance was attached to what was taught; today we need to discover what type of professionals and citizens a society needs' (Rivero, 2000, p. 104). The result is a school where the pedagogical relationships that have governed the school throughout time are altered.

Finally, it is possible to affirm that the curricular reorganisation in pedagogical cycles plays a central role in the generation of reforms that can be implemented in practice to promote the autonomy of schools and educational decentralisation. The transfer of pedagogical and curricular decisions moves them from central government to the school (García-Huidobro, 1999). From this perspective, learning, and the ways in which it can be optimised, through close collaboration with the agents who participate in it is made the centre of the educational process (Guzmán, 2004). This school finds itself facing a true transformation, where attendance,

contribution, participation and commitment are expected, to meet the standards of the educational community which is Codema College.

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