The Field of Curriculum Studies in Colombia

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INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING CURRICULUM

In this article I will present an interpretation of the history and the current state of the field of curriculum studies in Colombia, based on the works of researchers and practitioners published during the last five decades in our context. To do so, I will critically examine the development of the curriculum in Colombia and the meanings attached to this notion by educators and educational researchers. I will argue that a curricular approach championed by governmental agencies along with value-committed, ideological, interpretations made by teachers and researchers have made it difficult for the curriculum to take root and flourish in our soil. Finally I will present some recent developments that let us think that the field of curriculum studies in Colombia is emerging, especially in the higher education sector.

The notion of curriculum is ambiguous. In its most simplistic sense it can be considered a synonym for the term “course of study”. In this sense its use has been seen as unproblematic since the Sixteenth Century in English speaking countries (Hamilton, 1989 quoted by Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2000). In more recent times, it has grown broader to include all the educational experiences of students planned by schools (Posner, 1995). Used in this sense, it becomes so broad that it risks being equated with “education”. This lack of sharp boundaries makes Latin American academicians uncomfortable with the concept of curriculum because they see its mere presence in our context as an “invasion” of the pedagogical field and as being responsible for the “impoverishment” of our knowledge about education (Díaz Barriga, 1996). Furthermore, in Colombia the curriculum is regarded as an ideological tool used to displace the role of teachers and schools and pass the control of education to foreign interests through governmental agencies (Martínez Boom, Castro V., & Noguera R., 2003).

It is true that a Theory of Curriculum, in a strict sense, derives from the industrial era and its preoccupation with efficiency. Although the mainstream has been traditionally concerned with curriculum development, alternative curriculum theories have coexisted alongside this since the last century. Moreover, since the 70’s, curriculum theory has been concerned more with understanding and less with planning. This shift is known as “the reconceptualization of the field” and has opened up new opportunities to interrogate and challenge more traditional views (Pinar et al., 2000).

Today, curriculum plays an important role in the understanding of schools and schooling. It allows us to come to terms with the relationships between educational actions and the different contexts in which they take place, the interactions among the different subsystems that operate within the educational system, the relationships between teaching and the school and society (Gimeno Sacristán, 1991, 2010). Although the traditional view makes a sharp distinction between university researchers as developers of curricula and teachers as their implementers, from a critical perspective, the concept has the potential of

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empowering teachers in their roles as designers, developers, researchers and evaluators of the curriculum. Besides that, concepts such as “operational curriculum” remind us that even when acting as implementers, teachers are the actual creators of the curriculum in the sense that the decisions they take and their interaction with students constitute the actual curriculum. In this sense, the curriculum is always “locally produced” (Doyle, 1995).

Despite its great potential and explanatory power, the concept of curriculum has not played an important role in educational research in Colombia. As in other Latin American and European countries, in Colombia there has been a strong tradition built upon pedagogical theories and practices. Under this tradition, Colombian educators and educational researchers were not used to the term “curriculum” but employed normally terms such as “study plan” or “program”. In this sense “curriculum” is traditionally regarded as a concept introduced in our context 50 years ago by governmental agencies under the American Development Agenda for Latin America and the Third World oriented towards the external and centralized control of schools (Martínez Boom et al., 2003). Since then, “curriculum” equals “curriculum planning and management” and in this instrumental fashion the introduction of the curriculum is regarded as overshadowing pedagogy and the pedagogical field (Magnolia Aristizábal, 2008b).

In the following sections, first I will present the history of the curriculum in Colombia. I will take as breaking points four major curricular paradigms which have been dominant in our context at different historical moments: the traditional school, the active or new school, the technical curriculum and the critical curriculum. Based on the interpretation of how these different models rivaled for the control of the field and, especially how the critics have resisted the notion of curriculum, I then analyze the current state of the field based on the official discourse about the curriculum and the works of research and practitioner groups devoted to the understanding and development of alternative curricular ideas although not always acknowledged as such. Finally I present a summarized account of my argument in the conclusions section.

A (TROUBLED) HISTORY OF THE FIELD

Historically, the intellectual dependency of Colombian elites explains the dependency of the Colombian educational field. As a result of Spanish domination during the Colonial period, Colombia was ruled by “criollos” a small elite of white origin suffering from the complex of being Europeans-born and living outside Europe, and transmitting this complex through education. Thus, according to Helg (2001), instead of developing a sense of nationhood and building a national identity, Colombian education has traditionally been based on racial segregation, and cultural dependency (p. 304).

Regarding the field of education, the sources of this intellectual dependency were mainly from Western European authors, although in the last century this tradition coexists along with several US theories and authors as the sources of intellectual authority. In the last half century, however, various Latin American authors and pedagogical movements such as Paulo Freire and the Popular Education movement are also recognized as authoritative sources of pedagogical knowledge.

In an effort to identify the main sources of our educational thinking, Aristizabal et al. (2004) identify four paradigms in the recent history of Colombian educational thought: First, the German paradigm, in which pedagogy is seen as the foundational science of education. Pedagogy according to this tradition is anchored in Philosophical theories. Second, the French paradigm, after the sixties, which introduced the debate about the Sciences of Education, with a focus on Sociology for the interpretation of educational phenomena. Third, the Anglo-Saxon
paradigm which, allegedly gives a predominant place to the concept of curriculum and makes pedagogy subordinated to it (p. 8). Fourth, the Latin American paradigm, which rejects the banking education model and gives importance to the socio-cultural context of educational practice (p. 9).

Approaching our history of education from a curricular perspective, in the following section I will present an alternative view of this history organized around four approaches: The Traditional School, the Active or New School, the Technical Curriculum and the Critical Curriculum. Although each one of these curricular models can be situated at a defined historical moment, they also overlap in time as none of them completely displaces its predecessors. These approaches are curricular in the sense that they express the main educational ideals within the Colombian society at different historical moments although not all of them correspond to the Official Curriculum, if we understand this as the curriculum mandated by the law or as the curriculum enacted in schools.

The Traditional School

‘Traditional’ in our context means Roman Catholic. In 1887 under a recently enacted Constitution establishing political centralization, Colombia signed a Concordat with the Vatican. In 1903 the Government made Catholic Pedagogy mandatory as the official pedagogy for public instruction (Art. 10. Ley 39 de 1903). At the time, Catholic Public Instruction was seen as the only way to ensure a durable state of peace and to build a national identity among a sparse population widely dispersed within a difficult geography (Quiceno C., 1988, p. 60).

A characteristic of the Catholic school is its emphasis on the discipline of the body and of the soul. External discipline was aimed to be internalized and converted into self-restrain and self-control. If war was seen as a consequence of a lack of education, peace would come from an education focused on the discipline of work, hygienic habits, obedience and restraint (Quiceno, 1988).

According to Quiceno (1988), the inspection exercised over teachers, students and the rest of the school personnel was not just a legal figure, it embodied the character of the Catholic replicated through the manuals, the school register, the timetable, the attendance list, the organization of the classroom, the emphasis on writing etc. (p. 39): "It is a Pedagogy based on the imposition of positive laws, a systematic plan aimed to drive life through the practical paths of obedience to rules and authority, and the sacrifice of whim and egoism" (p. 81).

The program of studies for primary schools was organized around four areas: moral, intellectual, civic and physical education. Moral education was considered the most important of all (Decreto 491 de 1904, Art. 48). The subjects taught were: Religion, Reading, Grammar, Arithmetic, Writing, Drawing, Geography, National History, Natural History, Chanting, Gymnastics and Manual Work. Secondary schools called "Normal Schools" were aimed at the education of primary school teachers (Art. 107).

Despite the emergence of progressive curricular and pedagogical ideas since the 20’s, far from being progressive or child centered, the prevailing curriculum and teaching practices in our schools have been traditionally based on these Catholic values and rationale. An encyclopedic curriculum and rote, mechanistic, teacher centered, and hierarchical teaching methods have prevailed within our institutions since then. A remarkable exception to this trend was the Active School (Quiceno C., 1988).
The Active or New School

The Active or New School was a movement led by liberal, secular and progressive educators opposed to the educational tradition represented by the Catholic Church and anchored in the values of a rural society. It was made possible thanks to the convergence of different forces: First, the institutionalization in Colombia of the Social Sciences (Psychiatry, Psychology, Biology, and Sociology), the Health Sciences (Medicine, Physiology, and Hygiene), Economic and Administrative Sciences (Engineering, Agriculture) and the Natural Sciences (Astronomy, Cartography, and Chemistry). Second, the fact that this new knowledge derived from experimentation and not from tradition or sources of authority developed a new way of thinking about education. In 1915 the journal “Cultura” was founded and was devoted to the dissemination of these new sciences (Quiceno C., 2003, p. 169).

By 1914 Agustin Nieto Caballero, who studied at Columbia University with John Dewey, and traveled throughout Europe to become acquainted with the state of the art of his time, founded the Gimnasio Moderno (GM), a private school that was the first Active School in Latin America. Through the works of its founder the GM exercised an influence beyond being an elite private school, it set the standard for public education as well; around the same time several modernizing forces exercised influence over education: new educational institutions independent from the Church were founded by liberals, the Ministry of Public Instruction became the Ministry of Education and, finally, the arrival of the First German Educational mission in 1927 marked the institutionalization of the Active School ideals and practices.

The Active School in our context emerges as the result of different foreign educational influences and from our own ideas, interpretations and adaptations according to our needs and context. One important antecedent is the Individualism and Romanticism of Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Fröbel; a second is in strict sense the Active School represented by the works of Montessori, Célestin Freinet, Dewey and Decroly. Although belonging to a different tradition, after the 40s and 50’s, some educators even identify the Active School with the ideas of Freinet, Piaget and Wallon (Herrera, 1999, p. 29).

In Colombia the Active School was the expression of a rational pedagogy based on the knowledge of the human sciences and used as an instrument to resist traditional discourse, and the laws in force at that time. Since then, pedagogy has been mainly the expression of a set of actions and has been used more as a weapon and has not necessarily been consolidated as an intellectual disciplinary field. In Colombia pedagogy was synonymous with Active School, built around the concepts of the individual, the teacher, the child, and the citizen (Quiceno C., 2003).

Unlike Catholic pedagogy, the influence of the Active School was not experienced equally throughout the country. Most of the time, the influence of progressive ideas and curriculum was experienced only by privileged elites, while the rest of the country was subject to traditional education based not so much on theoretical convictions but as a consequence of the incapability of the Government to allocate resources, new materials and state-of-the-art teacher education and training (Helg 2001).

Thus, although the Active School was the official curriculum for basic education until the end of the 40’s, it was resisted not only by the old authorities -the Church and the conservatives, but mainly by parents from the rural areas, all of whom having been educated within an authoritarian model of education did not understand the emphasis on the autonomy of the individual, child interest, inquiry based learning, experimentation and exploration of
nature, etc. In sum, the Active School lacked the resources both material and cultural to continue (Sáenz Obregón, Saldarriaga, & Ospina, 1997, pp. 385-386).

Despite these difficulties and resistance, the Active School was the model for public education between 1935 and 1949 (Herrera, 1999). However, 1948 marks the beginning of a period called “Violence” in Colombia which will affect the school curriculum. Originally "Violence" was the expression of the confrontation between liberals and conservatives, and also the origin of guerilla warfare and the armed conflict between the State and subversive groups. Conservatives blamed the Active School and its libertarian methods and concepts for the lack of values of "an undisciplined generation" (p. 258), and, when in power, they replaced it with a school based on traditional values (i.e. mandatory courses of civility and good manners) and a behaviorist model. According to its critics, this model was developed with the specific intention of "avert thinking and training human capital instead of free citizens or individuals" (Quiceno, 2003, p. 323).

The Technical Curriculum

According to Helg (2001) education was an interesting field of debate in Colombia up to 1950. After that, Colombia decided to make use of international missions to address its major social and educational problems. At the same time, the elites had access to private schools and universities, contributing to the abandonment of public education as an ideological battlefield (p. 16).

Between 1948 and 1968, instructional design and planning and programmed instruction were introduced in non-formal educational scenarios outside the schools oriented towards segregated populations, such as illiterate peasants and manual workers. This is the case of the Popular Cultural Action program (ACPO), the National Service for Apprenticeship (SENA), and the Popular Training Fund (FPC). It was through the action of the Third German Educational Mission, derived from a cooperation agreement between the Colombian and the German government, that these techniques were introduced into the schools (Martínez Boom et al., 2003, pp. 35-59).

In 1956 the Government launched the first “Five Year Education Plan” including Decree 1710 from 1963 mandating for the first time learning objectives for all primary schools and Decree 1955 from 1963 reorganizing Normal Schools -high schools specialized in the pre-service training of teachers, and reforming their study plans (Martínez Boom et al., 2003, p. 59).

Under the same Five Year Plan, an important attempt to improve the quality of learning and teaching in schools developed from the work of the Third German Educational Mission. Thus, between 1968 and 1978, a group of Colombian and German educators working together introduced in Colombian schools the concept of instructional planning along with new teaching practices (Quiceno C., Sáenz Obregón, & Vahos, 2004).

Instructional planning was embedded within the pedagogical guides developed by the mission members. These guides contained the curriculum along with the teaching and learning activities that enabled teachers to deliver it. The guides were distributed and teachers were trained to use them all over the country. Although organizational difficulties made impossible to train and provide materials for the entire teacher population, this system for curriculum development and delivery was considered an unprecedented model in the history of education in Colombia (Rojas de Ferro, 1982).
Aristizábal, Muñoz and Tosse, (2008) analyze how the period between 1960 and 1975 is characterized by an emphasis on planning as the panacea to solve all the problems configured by International Agencies around the concept of “underdevelopment”. It is within this context that Curriculum planning is recommended by the international educational missions and adopted by our Government (p. 83).

In 1976 the Ministry of Education created the “General Direction for Teacher Training, Curriculum and Educational Media” (Decreto Ley 088 de 1976). This office formulated new curricula based on programmed instruction and instructional design. These curricula were generalized all over the country through a Regulation of the Ministry of Education regarding the Qualitative Improvement of Education (Decreto 1419 de 1978) better known as “Curriculum Renewal” (Molano Camargo, 2011). The primary focus of the program was the transformation of basic and secondary education. Curriculum is defined by this Decree as “the planned and structured set of activities in which students, teachers and community take part in order to achieve the aims and goals of education” (Deceto 1419 de 1978, Art. 2).

This program has been very important in the development of curriculum and in the discussion among educators because it made major changes in the system. The program included curriculum development, teacher training and massive distribution of curricular materials. Curriculum renewal was based on the procedures of Educational Technology and Instructional Design. It followed the logic of defining behavioral objectives, teaching and learning activities, and assessment indicators to ensure their accomplishment (Martínez Guerra & Herrera Bobb, 2002).

According to Vasco (Molano Camargo, 2011) Educational Technology and Instructional Design were interpreted by educational actors as a government strategy used to consolidate the “Taylorization of education”, where teachers and students are seen as mechanical operators of curricula designed by third parties, with the consequent loss of autonomy and the establishment of an instrumental relationship between teachers and students (p. 185).

The Critical Curriculum: Fighting Against the Technical Curriculum

If we understand curriculum as all the educational experiences planned for students within the context of educational institutions, there has been curriculum in Colombia, as in any other country, since we have had formal educational institutions. The concept of curriculum, however, was not present in our schools until the 70’s. Since the term arrived, its meaning has not emphasized “educational experiences” but “planning” instead. As a consequence, the curriculum has been something opposed to our educational culture and has generated a huge resistance in educators and educational researchers.

Both researchers and practitioners have created an alliance to oppose the notion of pedagogy to the notion of curriculum. There has been a call to resist the curriculum – embodying the technocratic control of schools, and vindicate the role of pedagogy – embodying the wisdom of teachers about what to teach, how to teach and what for. This opposition is considered to be at the heart of the Intellectual Field of Education (in Spanish, CIE), the Field of Pedagogy (in Spanish, CP) and the Colombian Pedagogical Movement (in Spanish, MPC), probably the most important educational movement in recent years in our country, aimed at repositioning teachers and pedagogy as the center of the educational field and to resist the notion of curriculum.

The Front of the Intellectual Field of Education
Diaz (1993) describes the emergence of the Intellectual Field of Education (CIE) as a process beginning in the 60’s with the Sociology of Education, a “subfield of research and training conceptually dependent on Sociology” (p. 86) that was never able to develop a theory of education from a sociological perspective in Colombia because "researchers remained alien to the pedagogical field and teacher education was too procedural and instrumental", p. 87. Only in the 70s was the structural critique devoted to the study of the relations between social mobility and education replaced by the study of schools as ideological reproduction loci (p. 97).

According to Diaz (1993) the CIE was properly developed in the 80s around the interpretation of the cultural and historical teacher movement and the criticism of and opposition to the rationalizing project of education taking place through instructional technology and curriculum reform (p. 115). This movement was in part aimed at developing a pedagogical project able to integrate theory, research and pedagogical praxis (p.114). Diaz calls this renewed interest from the Social Sciences and Philosophy towards Pedagogy a “Pedagogical turn” (p. 115). This turn is based on critical theory, Foucault and Gramsci, semiotics, linguistic and pragmatic discourse analysis, and emancipatory theories. All of these theories stimulated the proliferation of research projects and educational experiences integrated with new ways of cultural and pedagogical action (p. 119).

The CIE has been configured mainly around the production of a few research groups from major public and private universities. Among these groups, one of the most salient is the inter-institutional research group “History of Pedagogical Practice” (GHPP), an ongoing collaboration among four major public universities: Valle, Antioquia, Nacional and Pedagógica (Martínez Boom et al., 2003; Zuluaga G. & Ossenbach, 2004a, 2004b; Zuluaga & Echeverri, 2003; Zuluaga, Echeverri, Martínez, Quiceno, et al., 2003; Zuluaga et al., 2005).

The work of the group on educational research from the National University, commonly known as “Federici Group” (Zuluaga G., 2000) is also important in this respect. This group has tried to create alternative pedagogical and curricular visions based on the works of Bernstein, Kuhn and Habermas and others (M. Aristizábal et al., 2004, p. 14). The Federici group was one of the greatest opponents to the use of educational technology in education. Some of the main problems associated with the concept of curriculum are outlined below:

It is a rational action aimed at the production of outcomes (instrumental rationality) and, as such, it displaces the practical-moral dimension that has been prevalent in educational interaction through history; It assumes the division of educational work (design v. implementation); It is supported by a pseudo-scientific rationale that validates it as a fruit of human progress; It assumes the objectification of educational subjects depriving them of human interaction; It excludes the ambiguity innate to human interactions; It is limited in its acknowledgement of conflicts inherent to educational practice (Mockus, 1987, pp. 141-142).

The Front of the Field of Pedagogy

Zuluaga & Echeverri (2003) found it important to differentiate the Intellectual Field of Education (CIE) from the Field of Pedagogy (CP) to reclaim the autonomy of pedagogy from the rest of the Social Sciences known as Sciences of Education and to be able to produce its own language and concepts, beyond the reproduction theories (p. 121-122). It is not easy, however, to differentiate the production pertaining to the CIE from the works pertaining to the CP.

In any case, one of the major contributions of the GHPP is the appropriation and utilization of Foucault’s archeological approach to recover the history of pedagogical
knowledge and pedagogical practices, and to consolidate the epistemological status of pedagogy as the foundational discipline of education (Castro V., 2000).

Based on Foucault’s hermeneutical tools, this group, instead of studying the history of pedagogy, has attempted to build “a history of the knowledge practices about Pedagogy, Instruction, Education and Teaching in Colombia” (Zuluaga et al., 2005, p. 21). Thus Zuluaga and her colleagues understand the notion of ‘pedagogical practice’ so broadly that it could comprise the notion of curriculum. Pedagogical practice would include: pedagogical models, notions taken from other knowledge fields and applied by Pedagogy, ways in which discourses work within educational institutions, social characteristics of pedagogical practices within educational institutions, and teaching practices in different social settings (pp. 22-23).

The GHPP also coined the term ‘pedagogical knowledge’, and defined it as ‘nonscientific knowledge about pedagogy, because what pedagogy exist, operate and intervene within society is not science but other forces, forms, facts and practices’ (Zuluaga, Echeverri, Martínez, Quiceno, et al., 2003, p. 12). This concept has been one of the major contributions made by Colombia to Latin American education (Magnolia Aristizábal, 2008a) and has been the concept around which the pedagogical movement evolved.

This group has also studied what they consider to be the ‘rarification of pedagogy’ to explain how the introduction of the Educational Sciences (Educational Psychology, Educational Sociology, Educational Management, Educational Philosophy, etc.) led in Colombia to a process of disarticulation, atomization and subordination of Pedagogy as a discipline which became an appendix to those other sciences (Magnolia Aristizábal, 2008a). I find it somewhat paradoxical, that the main publications by this group of authors devoted to the study of the history of the pedagogical knowledge contain very few references to the works of pedagogues (apart from the ever-recurring names of Comenio, Herbart, Pestalozzi and Dewey) and rely heavily on the writings of sociologists and political philosophers (not philosophers of education) such as, Dilthey, Gramsci, Foucault, Habermas, Althusser, Derrida, Bourdieu, Passeron, etc. What they do is better understood as Sociology of Education (Díaz Villa, 1993) and most of the time it is not easy to identify what content of the pedagogical knowledge they are vindicating.

According to GHPP (Zuluaga, Echeverri, Martínez, Restrepo, & Quiceno, 2003), pedagogy is not only subordinated as a mere operational activity but it is also enclosed within the confines of the classroom as a consequence of the incorporation of disciplinary devices such as instructional process, curriculum and assessment (p. 25). The curriculum deprives pedagogy of its relationship with other sciences and disciplines, focusing exclusively on the teaching and learning process and defining learning in terms of behaviors. By doing so, pedagogy loses the possibility to examine in a broader sense the relationships between Teacher-School-Society-State-Culture (p. 26).

Following the same line of thought, the group "Pedagogy and Curriculum" from Cauca University has developed a research project called: “Study of the Relations Pedagogy-Curriculum in the Colombian Educational Tradition, 1960-2008”. From this project the group published a book called “The Overlapping of Pedagogy by the Curriculum”. In this book the authors attempt to show how the introduction of the Anglo-Saxon concept of Curriculum had the effect of hiding or concealing Pedagogy resulting in its instrumental use and impoverishment (Magnolia Aristizábal et al., 2008).

These authors apply a historic and hermeneutic approach to the study of 150 documents about the curriculum produced between 1960 and 1975. During this period, they
did not find any curriculum research or theory developed by local educators, just a non-critical adoption of imported curricula (Magnolia Aristizábal, 2008a).

In “A Critical Approach to the Concept of Curriculum” the group Pedagogy and Curriculum applies Díaz (1996) conceptions about the curriculum to their own local context to confirm the prevalence of a technical approach and the lack of a critical perspective about the curriculum in Colombia. The group restates the origins of the curriculum as an utilitarian, market oriented control and power device imposed by international agencies, dominated by the USA through the MEN to control education ideologically -“education as the engine of development” and to desempower teachers (Magnolia Aristizábal, 2008b).

Borrowing mainly from secondary sources, this group affirms that a pedagogical reflection has been absent from curriculum theory since its origins in the works of Bobbit and Tyler (Magnolia Aristizábal et al., 2008, p. 31). I find of particular interest the case of Tyler not only because of the importance given in his book to the design and organization of learning experiences (Tyler, 1949) but also because of the closeness of his approach to the pedagogical views of Dewey and the Active School that our critics consider to be at the outer reaches of curricular thinking. This is something important to take into account because it is a characteristic of Latin American academics to depend on translations and second hand comments more than on the reading of original sources. These commentators in the case of the curriculum have been mainly Mexican and Spanish authors (Malajovich, 2005) so we can assert that our understanding of the origins of curriculum and curriculum theory have been shaped by authors such as Díaz Barriga (1996) and Gimeno Sacristán (1991).

Fernández F. (2008) analyzes how “curriculum” substitutes for “program of studies” in the training of teachers under the guise of introducing them into a “modern pedagogical doctrine” (p. 116-117). Thus, the Tyler rationale becomes the “new pedagogical doctrine” under which teachers are going to be trained after 1970. This is why curriculum is seen as undermining the meaning of pedagogy (p. 119). Before that, the knowledge of teachers was founded upon Pedagogy (p. 114). Curriculum was not part of their plan of studies at the Normal Schools and it is hardly part of the plan of studies today at Education undergraduate programs. Curriculum today is often a constituent of courses called “Pedagogy and Curriculum” where curriculum is just mentioned as an operational organization of contents and activities.

As for the role played by the curriculum in disempowering teachers it could be important to see that the original training was aimed at developing teachers’ skills for “team work, self-improvement, self-supervision, curriculum evaluation, curriculum flexibility and participation in curriculum reforms” (Fernández F., 2008, p. 121). Fernández maintains that this was not the case because teachers are still dependent on materials and curricula. It must be said that this has never been the case. Each time the Ministry of Education wants to improve the quality of education, it goes back to the same old formula: hiring international experts, buying lots of texts and other curriculum materials, training some teachers to use them, training supervisors to ensure fidelity of implementation and wonders why after years of these efforts, schools remain the same.

Educators have been right in opposing the Ministry in their attempts to improve education by means of providing the system with a teacher-proof curriculum but they have been wrong in banning curriculum and curricular thinking from teacher preparation programs; empowering teachers requires developing more encompassing teacher preparation programs that offer a solid foundation in curriculum and pedagogy and hence allowing teachers to really own the curriculum by means of being able to develop, experiment with, research, improve,
evaluate, modify, and adapt curricular ideas. Isolating teachers from thinking about the curriculum only disempowers them and leaves them at the mercy of external decision makers regarding what is important to teach, for what purposes and by what means.

In one of the most important published research projects devoted to the history of curriculum in Colombia, entitled “Educational Technology and the Curriculum Model in Colombia” (Martínez Boom et al., 2003) the researchers defend three theses: First, that our educational field suffered a huge transformation between the end of the 40s and the beginning of the 60s both at the level of public policies and at the level of pedagogical practices. This transformation broke the continuity of the field with its pedagogical tradition (p. 21). Second, this break responds to the introduction of concepts such as development, human capital, education as a force for development, technological transference (the transfer of educational materials and techniques developed elsewhere, mainly in the USA), etc. This set of concepts is part of considering education an international rather than a national enterprise through the action of international cooperation agencies (p. 24). Third, that these transformations are in accordance with ideas which have emerged independently of the main educational theories developed through the History of Pedagogy and belong to the fields of Economics and Management. This set of ideas is identified with “the curriculum field” by the researchers (p. 26).

The curriculum field is then defined by these authors as “a knowledge space formed by discourses (theories, models, procedures and techniques of organization, design, programming, planning, and instructional management) on one hand oriented by the previous specification of learning objectives formulated in terms of behaviors and skills and, on the other hand, aimed mainly at ensuring effective learning” (Martínez Boom et al., 2003, p. 27). According to these researchers, the term curriculum does not belong to the field of education but to the field of work training (p. 27). They also draw a sharp distinction between “teaching” as the activity that enacts pedagogy and “instruction” as the activity that enacts the curriculum (p. 29).

Finally, it is important to explain that these authors identify two major and opposed rationales for education developed during the last century: One was the progressive movement centered on the interest of the child and learning by doing, the Active School, and the other focusses on instruction planning, organization and management; the latter one is the view associated with the “American Curriculists” (Martínez Boom et al., 2003, p. 28). At the same time, pedagogy equals progressive (“new”, “active”) teaching and learning practices and curriculum equals behaviorist instruction. Thus, instead of two alternative curriculum theories with their corresponding pedagogical approaches and practices, for Colombian educational researchers, progressive education is associated with “Pedagogy” and behaviorist instruction is tragically associated with “Curriculum”. The case of John Dewey is special. Despite the fact that he also wrote about the curriculum (Dewey, 1902), researchers make an exception to differentiate the meaning given by Dewey to curriculum within his active pedagogical theory and avoid including him as part of the “American Curriculists” (Martínez Boom et al., 2003).

The Pedagogical Movement

The Colombian Pedagogical Movement (MPC) is the name of a uniquely influential movement in Latin America in which university professors, researchers, intellectuals and school teachers decided to join efforts led by the Teachers Union (FECODE) since 1982 to discuss and rethink the aims of public education and the role of teachers as agents of education and as cultural workers, and to resist the curriculum model imposed by the Ministry of Education since 1978 (Suárez, 2002). This movement is regarded as the origin of the
conceptual field of pedagogy (CP) in Colombia (Martínez Pineda, 2011). At the same time, the pedagogical movement represents the politicizing of the teaching profession as it implied the acknowledgement of the politics implied in the organization of the school, the classroom, educational paradigms, etc. (Mejía, 2006, p. 295; Sáenz, 1987).

Why is this movement termed "pedagogical" and not "educational" or "curricular"? Martínez Boom (2009) explains the first question: Education is related to the State, the families, the system and all the subjects related to it whereas the pedagogical is the proper field of teachers. It is through pedagogy that teachers develop their intellectual and political activity and their identity as intellectual workers (p. 9).

Why was the Pedagogical Movement not building around the ideal of reclaiming for teachers the role of researchers, designers, developers and creators of the curriculum? I will explain later the ideological burden that curriculum carries in our context. However, the movement has had clear curricular connotations. Because it arose out of opposition to the behaviorist curriculum imposed by the MEN, one of the most important contributions of the movement was that it made visible thousands of practices developed by Colombian teachers that were actual curricular alternatives based on the principles deriving from popular education, the Active School, and critical pedagogy (Peñuela Contreras & Rodríguez Murcia, 2009).

Among other accomplishments of the MPC are the Pedagogical commissions, a Center specialized in Teachers’ Research and Studies (CEID), and a journal called Culture and Education. In 1987 the Movement hosted a National Pedagogical Congress reclaiming the reduction of the behaviorist emphasis on curriculum reforms, one of the major impacts of this claim is said to be the general law of education of 1994 which established curriculum autonomy for all educational institutions. It is not clear when the movement ended but it is clear that after the reform, the union became more interested in reclaiming labor conditions than in fostering pedagogical reflection and research among teachers (Martínez Pineda, 2011).

The MPC was made possible thanks to the co-occurrence of several historical processes going on at the time: the curriculum reform undertaken by the MEN, the boom of leftist social movements proposing alternative projects, teachers opposing the models imposed, and the emergence of FECODE as a collective actor that served as a vehicle for this opposition (Mejía, 2006). However, a key feature of this social movement is the contribution made by the groups of intellectuals researching pedagogical knowledge and praxis, as well as its historical roots discussed in the previous section (Sáenz, 1987).

THE CURRENT STATE OF THE FIELD

The Official Discourse: Curricular Autonomy and the PEI

The Political Constitution of 1991 defined Colombia as a Social State of Law and established participatory democracy as the form of government. Student and teachers participation was included for the first time in the government of educational institutions and university autonomy was included as a constitutional principle.

As a development of the Constitution, the General Law of Education (L. 115 / 1994) implanted curriculum autonomy for institutions at all educational levels. This law is considered a major accomplishment of the Pedagogical Movement (Quiceno C. et al., 2004, p. 149) as it was the result of a broad civil society movement called "Social Mobilization for Education".
In the absence of a mandatory centralized curriculum, the current curriculum context is one of administrative decentralization and school autonomy. Until 1994, the Ministry of Education dictated the contents, teaching methods and assessment techniques for schools. Now, each school has the autonomy to define its own Institutional Educational Project (PEI). The Ministry of Education dictates standards, and guidelines aimed at directing the actions and decisions of institutions and their consultants. These orientations do not replace the teachers in the decisions about content, teaching and assessment methods.

Once again in accordance with the participatory principles of the new Constitution, a first Decennial Strategic Plan for Education (1996-2005) was developed with the participation of the educational community organized around the movement "Education: A National Purpose" working in 150 task groups, organizing more than 300 regional and national forums, and preparing and discussing proposals from the several educational institutions, unions, NGO’s and civil society groups (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2000).

One of the echoes of the pedagogical movement, the regional pedagogical expedition, was incorporated within the Plan, in the form of a "National Pedagogical Expedition". Built on the tradition of other famous expeditions, such as the Botanical and the Cartographic expeditions, this was aimed at "acknowledging the institutions who have found ingenious and creative forms of education for their students. It was aimed at documenting, classifying and putting at the service of all teachers the pedagogical development achieved in educational institutions. It was aimed at being a factor for research and experimentation" (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2000).

Through the Pedagogical Expedition more than 3000 educational experiences were documented and hundreds of teachers had the opportunity to travel and interact with other colleagues building networks and developing new forms for teachers professional development programs as alternatives to the traditional hierarchical training courses (Díaz et al., 2004). Although these experiences represent an interesting sample of the multiple innovative teaching and curricular practices developed by teachers all over the country within a context of autonomy, the educational system as such has not been significantly transformed.

Thus, although the idea of the PEI was to transform educational institutions and practices by means of having educational communities building their own curricular and pedagogical projects (Aldana V. & Caballero P., 1997), the lack of practical and theoretical curriculum understanding, along with the weakness of democratic dialogue and deliberation within institutions made this ideal almost utopian. Despite this curriculum autonomy, most schools have been adopting curricula from publishers, consultants and from other institutions and continue doing what they were doing before having the power to dictate their own curricula (Molano Camargo, 2011).

Besides that, true participation has not being incorporated yet as the form to develop public policies. Although the current Decennial Plan for Education (2006-2016) implemented an online strategy for discussion and participation that can be seen as inclusive and innovative (Molano Camargo, 2011), most current policies have been constructed and implemented as a result of a top-down approach and, as such, have been resisted by unionized teachers (Martínez Pineda, 2011).

An offspring of the Social Mobilization for Education is the "Alternative Educational Pedagogical Project" PEPA, a project aimed at involving teachers in the discussion of a comprehensive public policy of education responsive to local needs; following the principles of education as a human right, human dignity, fairness, and participation; including the revision
of the aims of education, assessment and evaluation policies and practices, pre-service teachers education, and other reforms of the current education system including the budget needed to guarantee access to tertiary education, inclusion, lifelong learning, reduce class size, etc.

One of the key targets of the teachers’ most recent mobilizations is evaluation. In the absence of a National Curriculum, teachers see assessment as the new way to control what they teach and what schools do. The National Agency in charge of assessment is ICFES and graduates from all schools and university undergraduate programs are subject to national examinations. The content and orientation of these examinations have had an important effect on school and university curricula. It has been said that the new strategy substitutes assessment for curriculum. Standardized testing is the new educational technology where a curricular laissez-faire coexists with quality control of the outcomes through learning assessment (Noguera R., 2003, p. 177; Posada E., 2002).

**Curriculum Research: An Incipient Field**

Curriculum studies are relatively new in our context. According to Aristizábal (2008), before 1975 there was not research on the curriculum. As we have discussed before, our major educational influence has come from Western European traditions focused on Pedagogy and Didactics. As a consequence, in Colombia there has been little interest in curriculum as a field of study, since it is regarded as an Anglo Saxon tradition (Miñana Blasco, 2002).

To establish the current state of the research field, we examined the information available regarding schools of education, research groups, undergraduate and graduate programs, journals and articles devoted to the study of curriculum. As a result, we can assert that we found very few references to the development of the Curriculum field in Colombia, although there are some recent initiatives that allow us to think that the field is emerging, at least in relation to the university curriculum. This situation does not come as a surprise given the antecedents presented in the former section of this article. Pedagogy as the “foundational science of education” gets all the attention, whereas curriculum is usually absent or, when explicitly addressed, is an appendix often linked to and overshadowed by didactics.

Major schools of education declare their mission as promoting the advancement of pedagogy and education through research and teacher education. None of them declare curriculum studies at the center of their activity or declare the contribution to the curriculum field as part of their mission. We found only two graduate programs specialized in the study of curriculum. One is the Masters Program in Curriculum Design, Management and Evaluation run by Universidad Surcolombiana and the other one is the Specialization (Graduate Certificate) in Curriculum and Pedagogy from CIFE at Universidad de Los Andes. In the same university, the doctoral program (PhD) in Education includes among its aims the training of professionals who can make an impact on the development of curricula in schools of education.

There are a few research groups which include curriculum design, development and evaluation as their area of interest. Universidad de Caldas, Universidad de Nariño and Universidad del Tolima have groups specialized in university curriculum. As I will argue later, it seems that higher education holds more potential for the development of curriculum studies in the absence of a stronger pedagogical tradition in higher education.

Aristizabal (2004) summarizes 40 years of academic production relating to curriculum in Colombia based on work carried out at Universidades de Antioquia, Pedagógica, Valle and Nacional, most of which is devoted to reclaiming the centrality of pedagogical knowledge in
opposition to the invasion of the curricular paradigm. They also highlight the contributions of the so-called “critical curriculum” to the possibility of visualizing alternative approaches to curriculum theory which are more contextualized, integrated and aligned with a human education perspective (pp. 12-14). Within this line of thought we have already discussed the contribution of the inter-institutional group History of Pedagogical Practice which is expressly opposed to the adoption of the concept of curriculum but has made important contributions to understanding why this is the case in our context.

Another major contributions to the field has been made by the group “Pedagogy and Curriculum” at Universidad del Cauca, devoted to the study of the relationships between these two disciplines. They have developed a research Project called “Study of the Relationships Pedagogy-Curriculum in the Colombian Educational Tradition, 1960-2008”. From this project there is a published book entitled “The Overlapping of Pedagogy by Curriculum”. In this book the authors attempt to show how the introduction of what they consider to be the Anglo-Saxon/American concept of Curriculum had the effect of covering or concealing Pedagogy resulting in its instrumental use and impoverishment. The contributions of this group have been important to the development of the field as we have highlighted above.

There is also an inter-institutional doctoral program in education integrating the efforts of 10 public universities–RUDECOLOMBIA, in which the area called “Pedagogy, Curriculum and Didactics” is based on the idea that “the curriculum is an interface or mediation field between Pedagogy and Didactics … this is why we talk about relationships and not about differences between Pedagogy, Curriculum and Didactics. This conception allows us to overcome the confusion caused by the invasion of the curricular field into the pedagogical and didactical fields” (Magnolia Aristizábal, 2006, p. 48).

RUDECOLOMBIA has consolidated doctoral projects in the areas of History of Latin American Education; Curriculum, Pedagogy and Didactics; Educational Thought and Communication in several universities along the country. RUDECOLOMBIA is also linked to a line of research entitled “Subject, Pedagogical Knowledge and Science” uniting the efforts of two lines of research: “Curriculum and University” and “Sciences Teaching” aimed at “rethinking Colombian education in general and especially the university from its pedagogical and research practices”.

In recent years there are some research projects devoted to curriculum studies such as “The Evolution of The Curriculum Field in Colombia: The Caribbean Region” and “The Evolution of Curriculum in Latin America: Challenges and Developments” under the direction of Diana Lago from Universidad de Cartagena; the “Study of the Relationships Between Pedagogy and Curriculum in Colombian Educational Tradition: 1960-2008” under the aegis of the group Pedagogy and Curriculum under the direction of Magnolia Aristizabal from Universidad del Cauca. This is also linked to this doctoral program through the project: “Implementation of the Curriculum Field in the Colombian Educational Tradition: 1975-1994”. This aims to complement the study carried out by this group commented above.

Another association of universities, RUECA – Network of University for the Quality of Education, comprises several research groups including lines devoted to curriculum studies. The most relevant project reinforcing the influence of Diaz Barriga in our context is the “Evolution of the Curriculum in Colombia” which is part of a regional project led by this author entitled “Evolution of Curriculum in Latin America”. This is the only project we have found that is developed in cooperation with international research partners.
The weakness of the curriculum as a field of study is also apparent in the production of articles and books specialized in curriculum. The production is so sparse it cannot be identified as a field in itself. The universities who have developed the most significant production in the field of curriculum are Universidad del Magdalena, Universidad de los Andes, Universidad de Antioquia, Universidad del Tolima, Universidad del Cauca and Universidad de Caldas.

There are no specialized journals in the field of curriculum studies. We found several articles devoted to curriculum studies in the electronic journal “IERED” published by the Network on Research on Education at Universidad del Cauca. The Latin American Journal of Educational Studies published by Universidad de Caldas also has some articles published about the curriculum. The universities with research groups devoted to curriculum mentioned above are also the ones leading the production of books, articles, conference communications and presentations.

“Itinerantes”, a journal devoted to pedagogy, curriculum and didactics, published by the Doctoral program of Rudecolombia until 2006, was followed by a book series called "Pedagogy, Curriculum and Didactics". This series has published key books to help towards understanding the views of Colombian intellectuals about the curriculum. A good example is “The Overlapping of Pedagogy by the Curriculum” that I have discussed above (Aristizabal, 2008).

There are other recent studies showing a fuller understanding of the meaning and scope of the concept of curriculum. lafrancesco (2003) for example, has proposed a "new" concept of curriculum which includes "the anthropological, axiological, developmental, scientific, epistemological, methodological, sociological, psycho-pedagogical, didactic, administrative and evaluative foundations" along with the means used to implement these principles in an integral education system for students (p. 26). Although there is nothing new about including these aspects within the scope of the concept, what is new is the proposal to understand curriculum in this richer way within our context.

In the following section I will develop a critical appraisal of these works and show how the allegedly critical views of researchers have created a discourse that equates the concept of curriculum with the instrumental and technocratic control of education.

An Incomplete Appraisal of Curriculum Research

The picture I have presented here is necessarily incomplete. Based on the sources reviewed, my current understanding is that Colombian educational researchers have substituted an anti-curriculum discourse for research on the curriculum as a consequence of their adherence to a diffuse ideology encompassing anti-American, anti-Governmental intervention, and anti-technocratic values all at once. Thus, based on this ideology, researchers have created a discourse that equates the concept of curriculum with the instrumental and technocratic control of education by a government subordinated to imperialist interests. By doing so, most educators have undermined curriculum studies and curtailed the possibility of critically examining the interaction among the different systems affecting teachers’ and students’ educational experiences and therefore, have failed to support the improvement of the quality of education from a systematic approach.

Educators and educational researchers have not taken advantage of the explanatory power of the concept of curriculum because they have linked this notion with the technical control of education. In other words, they have substituted one curricular approach (the technical-scientific) and one curriculum aspect (planning) for the whole theory of curriculum or
the “curriculum paradigm”. By doing so, they have devoted their efforts to fighting it by adopting alternative concepts, such as pedagogy and teaching in opposition to the idea of curriculum. Although it is easy to sympathize with the cause of regaining the schools for teachers, rejecting the idea of curriculum does not represent progress in this direction. Regaining curriculum for teachers and students would have been a more effective way to follow this educational ideal.

Milíana Blasco acknowledges the fact that in Colombia only one approach to curriculum has been taken into consideration whereas alternative curriculum approaches have been ignored. Since its inception through the Curriculum Renewal of 1975, the curriculum field is defined in relation to the ideas of "planning, efficiency, improvements, quality, and the quick fix of social problems" (p. 18).

As long as curriculum arrives in this country hand by hand with a reform sponsored by international banking and as part of an instrumental and rationalistic approach (Gagné, Bloom, and behaviorism), the concept of curriculum is inevitably associated with this perspective, ignoring Humanistic, Hermeneutical or Critical curriculum traditions. Even now for some Colombian authors, who emerged from the debate of the 80’s, curriculum is synonymous with "educational technology" although it is enough to take a look at the voluminous historical text from Pinar and others (Pinar et al., 2000), radically critical of the instrumental approaches, to evidence other curriculum traditions (p. 29).

Thus, the concept of curriculum which Colombian educators and educational researchers oppose is a concept infused with an ideology. In the following paragraphs I will try to enter into a dialogue with the ideology represented by this opposition and, following Burbules (1995), I will attempt to understand their views along with the context in which they develop (pp. 65-66).

The concept of curriculum is ideologically driven at least in three dimensions: First, regarding scope, curriculum is associated with planning and for this reason the rest of educational activities are left outside its scope; second, curriculum is associated only with one theoretical approach, the behaviorist; third, curriculum is associated with an RDD (Research, Development and Distribution) approach that makes a sharp distinction between researchers (university experts) and implementers (school teachers). In what follows I will show how each of these problematic approaches leads to the rejection of the whole concept of curriculum as a consequence of a partial understanding of its meaning and scope.

In the first place, curriculum is associated with the planning and organization of contents and school activities. This approach belongs into an Economy-driven educational model:

The idea of Curriculum … is linked to the discourse and practices of “development” and “planning” that since the 50’s and coming mainly from the USA began a process of radical reform of Latin American education. Thus, the history of curriculum is the history of educational reform during the last forty years (Martínez Boom et al., 2003, pp. 70-71).

A pure technical view of educational planning was present in the spirit of that time. Educational planning, understood as experts training for curriculum design has been present since 1969… In 1972 the PNUD and UNESCO project introduced the Anglo-Saxon conception of curriculum on a wide scale … Acting under the paradigm of the
Curriculum, planning was supposed to solve all Colombian educational problems (Magnolia Aristizábal et al., 2008)

These quotes truly reflects the thinking of the time in which curriculum planning was adopted in Colombia. It also reflects adequately the technical concept of curriculum adopted at that moment. However, by assuming that the idea of curriculum is the same thing as curriculum planning, researchers miss the opportunity of using the concept of curriculum to critically examine the outcomes and aims of education, the relationships between school and society, the pedagogical approaches adopted, etc. By equating curriculum theory with curriculum planning and objectives-driven evaluation, educators are right in attributing an impoverished view of education to curriculum. But by doing so, researchers are not taking into account that curriculum planning is just one aspect of curriculum theory and also that there are multiple approaches to this notion. Thus the impoverishment does not derive from the concept of curriculum itself but from an impoverished understanding of curriculum that assumes that whenever we talk about curriculum we are talking just about the planning and organization of content and instructional activities.

In the second place, it is apparent that these authors acknowledge only one Curriculum perspective: The Behaviorist. In their view, this perspective reflects the true nature of Curriculum being objectives-driven, based on direct instruction and the training of pre-specified discrete skills. More than that, curriculum does not belong within the field of education but within the field of work training:

Curriculum theory belongs to the broader field of the theory of instruction, oriented to obtain the maximum efficiency and productivity from instruction through its design and detailed programming in the factory, the business world, the army, the prison, etc. It comes from “Taylorism” (the scientific organization of labor), management, and training –from Anglo-Saxon origins, developed since the beginnings of the 20th Century... clearly aimed at efficacy, profitability, social control, homogenization and normalization of human groups (Martínez Boom et al., 2003, p. 71).

For the "curriculists" the rationalization of the educational action is a design developed on the basis of a detailed analysis of the different occupations to which adult life will be subject within a modern industrialized society, founded upon the essential principle of the division of labor” (Martínez Boom et al., 2003, p. 74).

In this fashion, by equating Taylor with Tyler, curriculum results were linked to a view of education that is easily rejected. At the same time, all that is desirable in education is linked not to alternative curriculum approaches (Experiential, Problem-Based, etc.) but to Pedagogy (Active, Constructivist, Humanist, etc.). My point is that a deep understanding of curriculum and curriculum theoretical perspectives makes it clear that each curriculum approach includes certain pedagogical approach (Montoya Vargas, 2008; Posner, 1995). The fact that the concept of Curriculum comprises pedagogical practices is interpreted as an “overlapping” or “covering” of the pedagogical field by the curriculum field (M. Aristizábal et al., 2004).

In my opinion comprising does not have to mean overshadowing, or undermining pedagogy. It is an acknowledgment of the fact that curriculum is a much broader concept and it is more properly suited to dealing with the complexity of educational phenomena than pedagogy is.

In the third place, the concept of curriculum is linked by these authors to a certain approach to its implementation: The RDD (Research-Development-Diffusion) model (Posner,
where researchers (usually international experts in our case) design and develop certain curriculum and curriculum materials and “systematically disseminate these new materials and curricula to teachers for their use” (p. 208). Colombian researchers and school teachers have good reasons to oppose this approach because, as a consequence of being reduced to the role of implementers, teachers are disempowered and deskilled (Apple, 2000). Unfortunately, this is the approach more often used by the Ministry of Education each time advocates a national strategy for the improvement of quality in the educational system. (Right now while I write these lines, the same strategy is being implemented by the Ministry in the program “Everybody to Learn”).

However, researchers do not seem to be taking into account the fact that the RDD Model is just one approach to curriculum development and implementation. As with the former point, instead of opposing this particular approach, researchers blame the concept of curriculum as a whole for the external control of schools and for the deskilling of teachers. When developing alternative models to develop and implement curriculum, as with practitioners’ Action-Research projects, they consider these to be the product of pedagogical resistance by teachers to the curricular approach. This is at the basis of the Pedagogical Movement. And this is why the major achievement of this movement is the National Law of Education which established curriculum autonomy for schools as opposed to a mandatory, centralized curriculum.

In sum, for Colombian researchers there is only one curricular approach: the rational planning model, characterized by behavioral objectives, direct instruction and training, and a sharp separation between designers and implementers. Other curriculum approaches such as the procedural or practical approach in which teachers are the ones delivering, taking curricular decisions and using formative assessment to research the effectiveness of their designs, or the critical approach in which curriculum is seen at the same time as a device for social reproduction and as a tool for social change in the hands of teachers, are not acknowledged by them as curriculum approaches. The only source for these approaches which is acknowledged is pedagogical resistance to curriculum imposition.

Promises from Curriculum Research in Higher Education

In the intellectual history of the university in Colombia, German Arciniegas played a salient role during the 20th Century. As a historian, essayist, diplomat, and statesman, his ideas about the university exercised influence not only in Colombia but also internationally. Arciniegas (1933) understood the role of the universities as inevitably political and saw them as contributing significantly in the ruling of the society in which they take part. Thus, 60 years before the Constitution made it mandatory, Arciniegas (1933) defended the autonomy of the universities and proposed that students participated in their government. His pedagogical and curricular views were close to the proposals of J. Dewey, in which students learn democracy by taking part in the ruling of democratic institutions (Dewey, 1916). Universities still today are far from being democratic institutions but some of his ideas have taken form such as university autonomy and the participation of students in the decision organs of the university. The contribution of the universities in the making of more rational and scientific politics is yet to be seen, unfortunately (Arciniegas, 1932, 1933, 1943, 1948, 1994a, 1994b).

More recently, after reviewing the national production on Higher Education over the last 30 years, and despite having found more than 2000 studies during this period, Henao and Velasquez (2002) concluded that higher education has not been the object of systematic scientific research in Colombia (p. 288). They classified the studies into 12 categories, related to the philosophical and cultural foundations of university education, the history of the
university, the relationships between the universities, society and the State, relevance of higher education, higher education regulation and legislation, the organization of the system, quality and accreditation, scientific and technological production, university government and finances, scientific and technological production, and the academic profession.

What is quite apparent is the absence of systematic studies about curriculum and pedagogy in the university. According to Parra Sandoval (1996) pedagogical reflection has not been a concern for our universities. At the university level, knowledge about content substitutes for pedagogical knowledge and, as a consequence, the discussions concerning the pedagogical nature of university work have been traditionally undervalued (pp. 255-256).

Some of the authors who have made important contributions to the analysis of the university in our context approach key curricular issues derived from public policies such as standardized assessment, competency based education, curriculum flexibility and academic credits, accreditation, pertinence, etc. but they do not always interpret them as curricular themes neither do they approach the university curriculum in a systematic way (Gómez C., 2000; Orozco Silva, 2010, 2001a, 2001b).

In recent years, however, there is a promising series of publications on the topic of curriculum and pedagogy at the university level and, unlike the situation with basic and secondary school, it seems that the concept of curriculum has found more fertile soil in Higher Education. Paradoxically, this situation can be explained by the same reason that there is not a solid body of research on higher education: in the absence of a tradition in pedagogy at university level, it is easier to adopt curriculum as a concept and to explore diverse curriculum alternatives without the burden of displacing the interest on pedagogy by doing so.

In fact, some of the recent innovative proposals come from the groups working on the university curriculum. These authors seem to be clearly aware of the inherent relationships between curriculum and pedagogy (Díaz del Castillo, Goyes M., Guerrero T., & Uscátegui, 1996; López Jiménez, 2000; Mora Mora, 2005).

Following on from the idea that in Colombia there has been modernization without Modernity, Mora (2005) from the group Education Pedagogy and Culture in the Caribbean from Simon Bolivar University has documented the work of researchers who have made contributions in the last 20 years to the development of the curricular field from a critical perspective. He explores the work of Goyes and Uscátegui, López Jiménez and Díaz Villa. He maintains that their alternative proposals have in common a participatory and pluralistic conception of curriculum building, curriculum conceptualization as a permanent process of research and self-evaluation, a critical and emancipatory view of the curriculum, the conscious adaptation of higher education public policies, a call for interdisciplinary and socially relevant curricula among other features (Mora Mora, 2005).

Since 2000, Isabel Goyes and Mireya Uscátegui have been leading the research group "Curriculum and University" at Universidad de Nariño where they have contributed to fighting the myths and the reductionist notions of curriculum so prevalent in our context (2004, p. 17). They define curriculum as an "educational plan that actualizes and makes effective a pedagogical theory and that is oriented towards the development and learning of a group of students in a particular context" (p. 14). This group has also contributed to the dissemination and understanding of the different curriculum theories and approaches and of some Latin American and Colombian curriculum innovations developed as alternatives to the technical approach (Goyes & Uscátegui, 2000).
Goyes and Uscátegui (Goyes & Uscátegui, n.d.) also have proposed the reconceptualization of the curriculum as a participatory and democratic research field opening up to public debate such things as "our own curricular history, the interests behind the curricula implemented, the contribution of public university curricular and pedagogical practices to the principle of social fairness and also about the types of knowledge we have adopted, the ways in which they have been produced and selected, the criteria under which this knowledge has been legitimated, and the reasons why we have not produced knowledge to be validated and adopted in other latitudes" (n.d., pp. 39-40).

Nelson López has been leading a research group and an innovative project called PACA—Program for Alternative Curricular Action, since 1989 (López Jiménez, 1991). PACA's main purpose is curriculum construction with teachers, characterized by social and cultural relevance, in other words, it is geared towards addressing the needs of the particular context in which curriculum is designed, developed and evaluated (López Jiménez, 1995). López conceptualizes the dynamics of curriculum construction as a problematic area to be addressed mainly through research and critique and not through a mere instrumental or procedural approach (López Jiménez, 2000, p. 33).

One promising development is that PACA has been proposed as a model for curriculum construction based on an evolving set of principles developed through the interaction of the group with different institutions, programs, administrators, teachers, students and other members of the educational community. These principles are: research-based, participation, flexibility, social focus, praxis or the integration of theory and practice, permanence subordinated to relevance, interdisciplinarity, inter-institutionalism aimed at creating a national educational system that really works as a system and permanent evaluation (López Jiménez, 2000, 2001).

Among the many contributions of this line of work I should stress the emphasis placed by PACA on the inclusion of all groups of educational actors as a way to counteract the traditional tendency to trace a sharp separation between, on the one hand, university researchers as producers and disseminators of the curriculum and, on the other hand, teachers as consumers of the curriculum (López Jiménez, 2000, p. 35).

More recently, based on Derrida's concept of deconstruction, López (2001) proposes deconstruction as a necessary stage previous to curriculum construction in the XXI Century (p. 34). Also following this approach, Díaz Villa (2008) proposes to undertake a semiotic analysis of the prevailing curriculum in order to "deconstruct its subjacent interests and purposes and to be able to generate alternative curricular projects interpreting hegemony and revaluing the voice of human groups fighting for a better world" (p. 13). Unlike other authors, López and Díaz undertake a form of criticism that opens possibilities for further curriculum research and development.

Mario Díaz Villa has been a salient figure in the development of the curriculum field in higher education. He belongs to the Research Group in Higher Education at Universidad Santiago de Cali. After his seminal study on the Intellectual Field of Education (Díaz Villa, 1993), his work has been devoted especially to the university problems and most of it has been published by the ICFES (a national agency formerly devoted to the development of higher education, although its mission today focuses on assessment at all educational levels). His work has covered the preparation and practice of university professors (Díaz Villa, 1998, 2000a, 2000b), the analysis of the university curriculum (Díaz Villa, 2002, 2003, 2008) and the analysis of the official discourse in higher education (Díaz Villa & López Jiménez, 2001).
The research group Curriculum, University and Society at Universidad del Tolima, has also approached the study of the curriculum from a critical perspective reflecting on issues of quality and relevance and has proposed to conceptualize the curriculum as the opportunity to build more dynamic, integral and relevant connections between university and society (Malagón Plata, 2007).

Thus, despite its limitations it seems that curriculum studies in Higher education show some promise of developing into as a robust field in the years to come. In a study on the effects of the National accreditation process in the university curricula and, after reviewing the self-assessment processes undertaken by seven universities as part of their accreditation processes, Goyes and Uscátegui (Goyes & Uscátegui, 2004) identified the following current curricular tendencies: A movement towards more participatory forms of curriculum design; a general education component oriented towards the development of ethical values; some examples of curriculum integration, through "modules" and longitudinal projects; and finally a tendency towards the introduction of principles of flexibility, inter-disciplinary and integration of curricula (145-146).

CONCLUSIONS

In this final section I will summarize the central argument of this chapter. Based on what has been discussed above, it could be said that in Colombia pedagogy has overshadowed curriculum as a field of studies. The meanings attached to curriculum by local educators and educational researchers have made it difficult for this notion to play a key role in the understanding and improvement of education. Based on a diffuse anti-imperialist ideology, the notion of curriculum has been regarded as an ideological tool used to displace the role of teachers and pass the control of education to foreign interests through governmental agencies.

In order to understand how this happened, I first have presented Colombian educational history organized around four curricular approaches: The Traditional School, the Active or New School, the Technical Curriculum and the Critical Curriculum. These approaches express the main educational ideals within the Colombian society at different historical moments although not all of them correspond to the curriculum mandated by the law or the curriculum enacted in most schools at the time.

‘Traditional’ in our context means Roman Catholic. A characteristic of the Catholic school has been its emphasis on external discipline aimed to be internalized and converted into self-restrain and self-control. Despite the emergence of progressive curricular and pedagogical ideas since 1920, the prevailing curriculum and teaching practices in our schools have been traditionally based on these Catholic values and rationale.

The Active School was the expression of a rational pedagogy based on the knowledge of the human sciences and used as an instrument to resist traditional discourse. Unlike the Catholic school, the Active School lacked the resources both material and cultural to overtrump the traditional approach. Although it was the official curriculum for basic education until the end of the 40s, it found resistance by the old authorities as well as by parents from the rural areas, all of whom having been educated within an authoritarian model of education did not understand the emphasis on the autonomy of the individual, child interest, inquiry based learning, experimentation and exploration of nature, etc.

The technical curriculum is introduced in Colombia around the 50’s based on the recommendations of international missions through instructional design and programmed
instruction. It was done first in non-formal educational settings and then in formal education through the project known as “Curriculum Renewal”, based on the procedures of Educational Technology and Instructional Design. It followed the logic of defining behavioral objectives, teaching and learning activities, and assessment indicators to ensure their accomplishment. Since then, curriculum has been linked to this rationale and it is interpreted as a government strategy used to consolidate the “Taylorization of education”.

The “critical curriculum” is understood in our context as a pedagogical approach opposed to curricular thinking. Both researchers and practitioners have created an alliance to oppose the notion of pedagogy—embodying the wisdom of teachers about what to teach, how to teach and what for, to the notion of curriculum—embodying the technocratic control of schools. This opposition is considered to be at the heart of the Intellectual Field of Education, the Field of Pedagogy and the Colombian Pedagogical Movement all of them aimed at repositioning teachers and pedagogy as the center of the educational field and to resist the notion of curriculum imposed by the government.

Thanks to the efforts of the Pedagogical Movement during the first years of the participatory democratic institutions established by the Constitution from 1991, since 1994 each school has the autonomy to define its own Institutional Educational Project (PEI). The Ministry of Education dictates standards and guidelines but cannot dictate the curriculum. However, the lack of practical and theoretical curriculum understanding, along with the weakness of democratic dialogue and deliberation within institutions made curriculum autonomy almost utopian. Most schools have been adopting curricula from publishers, consultants and from other institutions and continue doing what they were doing before having the power to dictate their own curricula.

In sum, Colombian educational researchers have substituted an anti-curriculum discourse for research on the curriculum as a consequence of their adherence to an ideology encompassing anti-American, anti-governmental intervention, and anti-technocratic values all at once. Based on this ideology, those researches reduced the notion of curriculum to instructional planning, a behavioral pedagogy and a research-development-distribution approach. As a consequence, researchers have created a discourse that equates the concept of curriculum with the instrumental and technocratic control of education by a government subordinated to imperialist interests. By doing so, most educators have undermined curriculum studies and curtailed the possibility of critically examining the interaction among the different systems affecting teachers’ and students’ educational experiences and therefore, have failed to support the improvement of the quality of education from a systematic approach.

Evaluating this state of affairs in retrospective, it can be asserted that educators have been right in opposing governmental attempts to introduce a teacher-proof curriculum but they have been wrong in banning curriculum and curricular thinking even from teacher preparation programs; a solid foundation in curriculum and pedagogy would allow teachers to really own the curriculum by means of being able to develop, experiment with, research, improve, evaluate, modify, and adapt curricular ideas. Isolating teachers from thinking about the curriculum only disempowers them and leaves them at the mercy of external decision makers regarding what is important to teach, for what purposes and by what means. Pedagogical knowledge is supposed to play this role but it has shown to be insufficient in most of the cases.

As a result of the ideological thinking about curriculum in Colombia there has been little interest in curriculum as a field of study, although there are several recent initiatives that
allow us to think that the field is emerging. Thus in recent years there is a promising line of work on alternative curriculum approaches especially in higher education but not limited to it. It seems that the concept of curriculum has a promising future in the works of teachers and researchers oriented to the development of participatory forms of curriculum design, socioculturally relevant curricula, problem and project-based curricula, and the introduction of principles of flexibility, interdisciplinarity and integration of curriculum.

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