

New Scenarios in Latin American Schools. The Needs for a Contextualized Teaching Practice

Los nuevos escenarios en la escuela Latinoamericana: Las necesidades de una práctica docente contextualizada

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Nowadays, Latin American schools face very complex scenarios. The daily practice of most teachers demands that they satisfy the emerging needs of children and young people from social environments where poverty is increasing and more complex, social exclusion is more strong and where the lack of cohesion results in an increasing individualism (López, 2009).

It is already difficult to face communities with a social fabric in permanent change and breaking down, affecting the educability. The government demands that schools make achievements in accesses, learning and permanence (Fernandes, 2014), at least equivalent to those made in other parts of the world, while the academy demands achievements in learning relevance and contextualization (Herrington, Yezierski, Luxford & Luxford, 2011) and in quality of services (Aranguren, 2007).

Communities with new needs as well as political and academic demands of high implications define different educational scenarios that gradually move away from those scenarios for which they were originally meant, as they were conceived from and for them. Therefore, current schools show to be little porous institutions without capacities to read the signs of the environment and to try to adapt to them. On the other hand, teachers operate

as defenseless actors that stumble trying to avoid the gaps between what they are able to offer and the needs of new students, needs that must be addressed in specific social environments.

The situation demands an ideal teacher with capacities and tools for dealing with the diversity, with which the real teacher does not have. Therefore, it is logical to deduce that crisis of schools is explained in great proportion by the limited capacities of the teachers to evaluate the magnitude of changes (López, 2009), capacities that would be also necessary to structure responses that ensure a minimum adjustment between institutional offers and local needs.

What would be the necessary teacher profile to suitably respond to the new scenarios and needs? Many people think that this profile would be a profile aimed at achieving a reflective and contextual practice (Chacón, Chacón & Alcedo, 2012), taking into account that teaching has become an unpredictable activity that is part of an uncertain process and is marked by complexity (Perrenoud, 2004). If so, the following question needs to be asked, what could facilitate or impede the achievement of this teacher profile? Under which conditions could changes occur? Is it possible to achieve them with current in-service education programs as designed, or are special organizational provisions required? These are questions that require effort to answer them.

Part of these answers must reconsider some of the reflections of Imbernón (1994), who says that professional development of the teacher is not limited to educational theory, but it goes beyond it. It is greatly developed in the practical field, space where knowledge and beliefs that guide their actions are applied and tested. It is about a training process that takes place in stages, where the teacher goes through a basic training in professional socialization that changes and defines the attitudes, values and habits that will characterize their performance, to continue with professional inductions and, finally improvement processes through in-service teacher training. Each of these stages must increasingly incorporate reflection and understanding of the practice, as well as the questioning of some elements that make it up and the intervention for constant improvement that many times supposes a deep transformation of teaching culture.

What Imbernón says is true, since as it is known educational interventions do not ensure necessarily changes in teaching practices, especially when in-service teacher training is limited to the strengthening of disciplinary contents and/or teaching methodologies, operating from remedial and logical-prescriptive approaches (Gonzalez-Weil, Cortez, Pérez, Bravo & Ibaceta, 2013), without incorporating –or tangentially incorporating – learning from the most successful previous experiences that have to do with the space arrangement for collaborative work that favor reflection, exchange of good practices and questioning of knowledge and beliefs (Park Rogers et al., 2007).

It appears to be that changes only happen on certain occasions and when they occur, they do so in complex and slow processes (Fullan, 2007; Hernández & Goodson, 2004), since they are simultaneous changes of beliefs about teaching that have been incorporated by teachers throughout their lives and based on which they develop their ideas about what is right or what is desirable (Pozo, Scheuer, Mateos & Pérez, 2006). In this regard, the adoption of new ways of thinking and doing things need a basis of beliefs aligned with these orientations, as a condition that supports the teachers' willingness to change. (Herrington, et. al., 2011).

The literature in the field reports that change of implicit and not-conscious teaching beliefs is only possible in the framework of processes favoring their explanation (Pozo, et. al., 2006). Therefore, simple training does not ensure that teachers will reflect what has been learnt by introducing changes in their practices, and that they will do it in the expected way (Herrington, et. al., 2011). The most successful learning from training experiences show that giving the teachers the opportunity to question their own practices and beliefs, makes them assume reflective and open positions, a necessary condition to produce desired changes (Chamizo & Garcia-Franco, 2013; Park Rogers, et al., 2007; Vezub, 2007).

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