COMMUNITY EDUCATION
IN ECUADOR: THE CASE OF THE PROVINCE EL ORO
EDUCACIÓN COMUNITARIA EN ECUADOR: EL CASO DE LA PROVINCIA EL ORO

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ABSTRACT

Community education in the province El Oro, Ecuador was examined from a pedagogical perspective. A study based on key interviews with experts and local opinions points out not only the importance of community education in rural areas, but also its gaps and challenges. The exploration of the school as a cultural cosmogony was suggested in order to set-up a pedagogical work frame. This paper proposes pertinent strategies for an effective pluri-cultural community education system.

Keywords: Education, community, school.

RESUMEN

La educación comunitaria en la provincia de El Oro, Ecuador fue examinada desde una perspectiva pedagógica. Se realizó un estudio basado en entrevistas clave con expertos y opiniones locales señala no sólo la importancia de la educación comunitaria en las zonas rurales, sino también sus lagunas y desafíos. Se sugirió la exploración de la escuela como cosmogonía cultural para establecer un marco de trabajo pedagógico. Este artículo propone estrategias pertinentes para un sistema educativo comunitario pluricultural eficaz.

Palabras clave: Educación, comunidad, escuela.

UNIVERSIDAD Y SOCIEDAD | Have Scientific of the University of Cienfuegos | ISSN: 2218-3620   Volume 9 | Number 3 | April-August, 2017

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INTRODUCTION

Promoting a communal education requires a close relationship among the school, teachers, pupils and the community. This pedagogical approach is based on Paulo Freire (1999), who considers that education must be performed under inherent social contexts, for the correct formation of autonomous citizens. To achieve this, it is required to build a commitment between the teacher, community and government authorities that contextualizes the school reality (Pérez & Sánchez, 2005). The methodological strategy implies that teachers and students identify a concrete and objective situation and act critically on it. In this process, thinking, language and environment are interrelated permanently, as a collective act and social transformation of the subject (Freire, 2007). It also involves unconventional juman conducts that arise from the need to act within the local society, and which the formal school does not consider or share. This article offers a methodological approach of the community education, its characteristics and need for implementation in the rural context of the Province El Oro, Ecuador.

The population of the province El Oro is a mixture of Spanish influences and ancestral traditions. Within the local ethnic groups converge culture roots and narrative tradition of religious, moral and ethical content. Beside the bibliographical evidence also were used theoretical, empirical and participatory techniques such as observation and group interviews. These were thereafter analyzed and discussed by experts and community educators.

DEVELOPMENT

Community education is understood as the participation of parents and natural organizations, teachers and students in the functioning of community-based school units. This educational administration has general aims defined for making important decisions for the school life. It responds adequately and pertinently to the multi-cultural and multi-lingual needs (the recovery of ancestral and land knowledge) and its four dimensions: being, knowing, doing and free will. The main objectives are:

- Expand and diversify the educational opportunities from the initial education until the culmination of their basic education, for children and young people of localities with high and very high social margination and neglected education rights.

- To contribute on the improvement of the quality of learning and educational practices according to their privations and characteristics.

- To promote the participation of everybody for the permanent improvement of education services.

- Continuous improvement of teaching processes under different contexts.

- To contribute to the personal improvement and to the permanence in the community service of the teaching individuals.

In this sense, community education is an intervention that ensures effective processes of learning and teaching, as well as mechanisms for teaching empowerment and social participation that respond to the specific needs of communities. One of the main characteristics of community education is dialogue-based learning under the principle of "learning to learn". By this mean, each child, family and community will advance in the level of knowledge according to their individual and collective capacities. It is through dialogue, as education reaches its true humanistic character and becomes "practice of freedom." Community principles imply a change of content and educational structure. This means leaving anthropocentric individualism to enter a natural community logic that reduces teaching individualism by mean of community teaching and assessment. Therefore, to avoid a process of disintegration of the human being and nature and to replace it with an integral consciousness with nature, to leave behind a teaching approach oriented to obtain mainly a work force and replace it with institutional teaching that allows to express our natural capacities. Replacing the rationales of merely understanding by a practical understanding with wisdom, attempting to reduce the teaching that encourages the spirit of competence by a complementary learning with all-live-well and in completeness. A revolutionary way to get liberated of the foreign educative influences cannot be enough just by filling up the teaching curricula with ethno-cultural issues and a reductionist historical approach. Instead, it is required to generate new ways from the native cosmology, the psychological processes of learning and to raise our own approaches and principles from the community logic and paradigm.

Educational empowerment and the acquisition of community awareness in today's rural environment

Freire (2007), proposes to start with the public cultural knowledge and the man-spatial relationship. Within a fluctuating time such a relationship must be well-oriented, for the communities, in collective formation, to express themselves in a coherent way with the purpose of contributing to the improvement of social forms. This consideration raises the fundamental role of community social relations, as they are developed as a participatory, democratic and liberating process. The formative action has to strengthen its

educational discourse, taking into account the identity and solidarity of the members of the community, whom express their interest in solving the problems of their environment. Knowledge must arise as an essential feature from the community and free speech, where learning is a factor to build self-esteem. The teacher, called leader for community education, has the task of being a mediator or facilitator of learning, using strategies that favor the interaction of children with knowledge with other children, with the teacher and with their social environment. The community plays a central role in the curricular contents, in the enrichment of the knowledge of the inhabitants and in assuring that the pedagogical strategies are both meant for school and extracurricular acts. The native cosmology conceives the community as a unit beyond the social and the learning processes. Learning cannot be individual or isolated from the environment because the perception of nature tells us that everything is connected, thus everything in life is expressed in a permanent dynamic reciprocity. Thus, in community education, teaching cannot be isolated from nature, it rather must teach to understand and respect natural beliefs (Huanacuni, 2015). According to Freire, to educate is, first of all, to identify problems. It is through the problem identification by humans in their relationship with the world and with other humans, by which a deep apprehension of reality is provided. Community education must take into account that awareness is of considerable importance because it is linked to cultural patterns, codes, ethnic values and ideals. The role of the educational process is projected even further since it represents elements that can create a relationship thinking-reality that breaks the discordance between the transmitted knowledge and what is perceived in the social world. Thus, Freire's dialogue emphasizes the central role of his educational conception, based on values, qualities and attributes that must be internalized; not in something that is innate or assumed, but rather predicates that are generated by means of an emancipation practice. The current country situation offers the possibility of transforming schools into true democratic communities, schools where children and young people can dream, and that people's community feel represented not only by solidarity, but also by participation in the formation of values, in making polices and the elaboration of a project that, although it may seem like a dream, is futuristic, full of hope (Cabrera, 1996).

What follows are some premises that arise directly from this position.

- Education is everyone's responsibility.

- It is permanent.

- It is circular and cyclic.

- The process is complementary to community construction.

- It is continuously assessed by the community.

- It follows a natural methodology.

- It is productive.

- It allows the expression of natural capacities: (a) species, for example, humans, dogs, trees, insects, etc.; (b) gender, men and women; (c). Intra-species, for example, one woman is not equal to the other, not one male is equal to another.

- It teaches new skills.

Education in our mother tongue: (a) Cultural identity is what emerges from the relationship with the environment in a caring way. (b) Education accepts the complementary identities that emerge from the encounter of different people. It is important to learn and share with other people. (c) The natural identity is the identity inherent in all beings, with harmony and balance. So, community education follows the logic of a relationship between life and living-well. The most important education in life is what enables us to live in harmony and allows us to raise awareness. The school must provide us with elements to learn to live. -It is not enough to teach the best way to earn a salary. It is necessary to teach principles and values that can transform the mind and build a good heart from where an internal harmony arises, not only for ourselves, but also to generate harmony around (Nunez, 1989).

Factors that affect the process of community education, restrain the integral formation of students and avoids the development of the quality of education in the Province of El Oro.

- The absence of culture in the evaluation of the education process.

- Limitations in public administration and educational leadership.

- Deterioration of social values in teachers and students.

- Lack of professional academic training of school managers.

- The practice values are at the discretionof the teachers and do not consider institutional strategies.

- Rupture of the working environment and good institutional living.

- Impairment of the integral formation of the students.

- Disregard of the social demands and community context.

- Lack of training and stimulation of the institutional commitment of bureaucratic actors in respect to the social order and their functions, developing in a situation that affects good educational quality.

- The current model of the educational process adopts characteristics of outdated, decadent and lacking axiological components.

- Lack of commitment to guide the academic practice and administration of the schools and the lack of contribution to the socio-cultural development of the next educational community.

- Lack of democratic, prospective and transformative practices, lack of demand for evaluation and accreditation of educational institutions, a condition that obstacle the development of quality education and excellence, the creation of an adequate organizational climate and attention to community demands.

The current community education in Ecuador. The public actors who provide community education are:

- Leaders for Community Education. These are young people between 16 and 29 years of age who provide their social service as educational representatives and settle in the community.

- Community members organized by the Community Education Promotion Association (APEC). They intervene in the definition of actions, the installation and organization of educational services, as well as the lodging, feeding and care of the Leader for Community Education.

- The Council for Community Education. It is responsible for providing the material and operational support necessary for the operation of the services, which includes the training of educational representatives and the provision of classroom materials and school supplies.

Figure 1. Street graffiti with governmental propaganda.

The school as a community universe capable of forming a comprehensive education

The school provides supportive subjects towards its community and generates new learning. The space for the development of community education works under the context of a public school. It assumes that the school provides socio-cultural places for encounters and discussions about the school, community culture and identity construction (Áreas, 1995). The school and the community share a space where the community culture works and develops (Ander, 2000; Macías, 2013) to respond to the needs of the formation of the new generations from the educational potential linked between school and community culture. The speed of change in the society in which we live forces us to redefine how we will educate the new generation (Bruner, 2000). The formative potential that the school community offers goes beyond simple interaction with the physical environmental, and extends to the economic and cultural space of the school neighborhood (Pérez, 2010). Throughout history, the community has been the subject of study and diagnosis by psychologists, sociologists, architects, governmental and non-governmental institutions. They all offer different strategies, although all them works with different criteria and statements. Each community has characteristics that give it a certain identity and social personality which is unique. The procedures used for its study should not be rigid, but vary depending on the space, type of community where the school is located, and the school past, present reality and expectations of its inhabitants. Thus the social characterizations should not be reduced to the detection of community problems, but must take into account all aspects which describe and try to interpret the cultural context to give more specific references for teaching. For the study of the school community, the fast approach method is used for the need to obtain the information in the shortest time possible (Áreas, 1995). The study should follow the structure of the method, so that the exploration of the community is structured in stages (Figure 2):
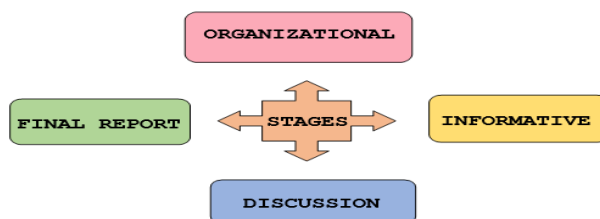

Figure 2. Stages of the method.

Organizational stage. It is one of the most important steps of the research focused on the selection of the system of indicators meant to obtain the information. Thereafter is necessary to take into account the instruments to be used in the next stages (Figure 3):
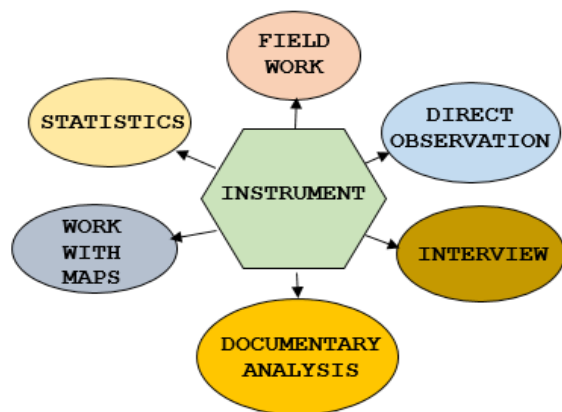

Figure 3. Organizational Stage.

The organizational stage includes people that can help to obtain different kind of information. Local informants must be those persons who have knowledge about the environment or problems on which the research is conducted. In the community there are different types of information to be gathered:

- Official information by public servers or office analysts.

- Social organizations by leaders of popular organizations.

- Citizen to Citizen, local informants whom help to clarify and organize daily life and collective memory.

- Expert information by research experts who have indept and global knowledge of the community universe.

Information stage: The information *in-situ* at the place that gives life to the community, the instruments are applied on the basis of the specific nature of the information. This is followed by the development of other instruments *in situ* to get an good approximation to reality. Stage of discussion: Each member of an interdisciplinary team must be able to interpret the information obtained and then integrate the information obtained in a common report. In this activity, it is recommended to engage the participation of an expert leader that could answer any questions that might arise.

The final report: It is an integration of the community characteristics and the potential that the community environment presents and that can be used by the teachers in the classrooms.

Pertinent trends for improving the community education? (pending title)

The teaching - learning process is a system of action and interaction of teachers and students to reach a certain objective, taking into account both the activities of one and the other, as well as the communication that must be established between them. There are different tendencies in educational practice, *albeit erroneous*, to consider it important to prepare for the logical and orderly transmission of knowledge and for students to carry out a system of activities, in most cases without establishing a relationship between them. The course planning and class preparation by teachers must have an individual and collective character, and synthesize the ways and means with which the subject will work in order to fulfill the objectives. Here it is necessary to analyze structural components and functions of the teaching - learning process so to exploit the relations of coordination and subordination that form the psychological, logical and pedagogical potentialities of the school community. When developing school programs in connection with the school community, it is necessary to take into account the potential of the community that can be used in each of the programs. In this sense, the principle of endogenous development that allows for the cultural leading role of the school is taken into account (Ander, 1987). The proposal is characterized by flexibility, which is evident in the possibility that it offers to be used in the methodological preparation of teaching activities, depending on the characteristics of the communities of the school where they work, and the particularities of the available resources. Under current conditions, the school is required to educate in values, to develop students' cognitive independence, to enhance creativity, as well as the ability to observe (Sandoval, Guerra & Contreras, 2010). In the course of the current century, the class must meet requirements that have an adequate education for life, where the link with the school community becomes the driving force for the achievement of these goals (Cortón, 2011).

The potential of the community to teach may take into account the didactic differences. It is necessary to slow the orientation towards the objectives, since on it depends the success of the link in giving treatment to the new subjects of education. From the elements presented, the objectives must be achieved, that is, the student learns from the knowledge he possesses and those provided by the school. Due to this fact, to establish the link of the contents with the community of the school must take into account the methodological steps that are described below: (1) Expert educators opinions and community mentors on the level of knowledge and academic potential of the

school community. Experts and educators have the ability to examine students' strength and potentialities that can be used in developing the content of the lessons. In this exploration it is possible that the students get evidence that the teacher has not included "something" when preparing the teaching activities, known as incidental elements. Incidental cases must be solved by participation within class and with compliance with the requirements of the class. In this way the student is oriented to understand his or her reality, to interact within and to understand the importance of practical life. (2) A didactic introduction to contents in connection with the school community. The students should face problematic situations and establish links with the school community to build new knowledge. The situation must be expressed in such a way as to be of interest for students, and generally be related to everyday life. The aim of the presentation of the situation is for the activities to make personal sense for the students. They become familiar with what is new to learn, and to understand the social significance of the new subject. When forming this link, both inductive or deductive procedures can be used, in correspondence with the type of knowledge to be taught to students and dependent on the complexity of this. (3) An implementation of didactic contents within the school community for learning reaffirmation. Therefore, it is recommended that complementary tasks are developed that contain situations that are specific and meaningful for the life of the students. Together with the proposed elements, the complementary tasks should allow for a systematic evaluation of student learning and offer feedback to the process as much as necessary. This bonding tasks should be characterized by allowing the students to learn what to do, in response to a developing character expressed in his potentialities to reinforce the sense of belonging to his birthplace, the development of protective senses and conservation of nature.

CONCLUSIONS

The study characterizes teaching in educational institutions of province El Oro, points out weaknesses and the need for its transformation towards the implementation of the community education process and the theoretical and methodological proposals for the practice of the concept of school community. It is a relevant material that allows us to identify the lack of practice of an educational process, democratic, prospective and transforming, lacking the demands of the process of evaluation and accreditation of educational institutions, a situation that obstacles the development of good education. It shows how this type of education makes possible the creation of an adequate organizational climate and the attention of the community demands. The current case of community education

and governmental agencies that provide education in Ecuador. This paper suggests the establishment of pertinent strategies for the community education system.

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