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**CURRICULAR INTEGRATION AS A STRATEGY TO STRENGTHEN THE EDUCATIONAL  
PROCESS IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS IN COVID-19 TIMES<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

This document intends to inform the reflective process that the teachers at the Jorge Eliécer Gaitán High School in Florencia, Caquetá, have had as a solution to the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has left on public education. First, it addresses the problem identified in school in terms of applied teaching methodology and the need to change it to improve student motivation and learning in the midst of the pandemic. Then, it shows the methodology proposed and applied by the teachers in the school. Finally, it highlights the effects that the methodology has had on the perceptions of teachers and students on the teaching and learning process.

**Keywords**

Education — Curricular integration — Learning — COVID-19

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## Introduction

Throughout history, human beings' health has been critically affected by different pandemics. Illnesses like typhus, smallpox, influenza, HIV, cholera, H1N1, among others, are still remembered because they left huge numbers of decease; for example, the bubonic plague that spread in Asia, Europe and Africa in the 14th century killed around 100 million people.

Pandemics, in addition to having an unusual political impact because they test the capacity of governments to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of their public health systems they have important impacts on other sectors such as life itself, in this sense, COVID-19, for example, discovered at the end of 2019 in China, it has seriously destabilized not only the health system but all the other areas like economy and education even in the countries with the highest technology in the world.<sup>2</sup> The numbers of deaths from COVID-19 are alarming and the spread of the disease is exponential.

In Colombia, the outlook has been more critical because the oficial number of infected people has rapidly increased even with the restrictions and methodologies used by the government to prevent it. One of the most affected regions in our country has been the Amazon region; the high impact of the virus in this region is due to the lack of health resources in the zone and the poor accessibility to take the COVID-19 test. Caquetá is located in the Amazon region, however, the number of infected people who have been reported in this department is less than 30 by june 18.

The national government has implemented different strategies to slow down the spread in our country. Some of those strategies are: quarantine, social distancing, washing hands and wearing a mask. Many of the strategies have had an impact in how people relate to others and how things are done and must be done during the time this virus lives and affects us. Since the statement of the pandemic, the schools were closed and students were sent to vacations. Anyone could know how big the impact of this virus was and how long it was going to affect us. At that point teachers, parents and students had a lot of questions about what was going on and how education was going to continue after the vacation time.

The strategies taken by the State revealed the serious situation of the Colombian educational system, which in the departments such as Caquetá and the Amazon region have generated serious consequences in the teaching and learning processes, since the problems of curricular fractionation came to light, the lack of appropriation of ICT by teachers, little or no access to information and communication technologies, among others. In our school, each grade from 6th to 11th must take at least 13 subjects including: maths, social sciences, spanish, technology, physics, biology, chemistry, English, arts, physical education, philosophy, ethics, religion, among others. By the time the pandemic started in Caquetá, our students were asked to send 13 or more activities every two weeks; that was because each teacher was working in isolation, so each one was assigning a task or activity to the students. This implied a lot of stress not only for students but for teachers too.

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<sup>2</sup> Diego Arbeláez-Campillo; Magda Rojas-Bahamón & Marianna Dudareva, "Las pandemias como factor perturbador del orden geopolítico en el mundo globalizado", *Cuestiones Políticas* Vol: 36 num 63 (2019): 134-150.

Due to the urgent need for reducing the amount of work students and teachers were dealing with, a group of teachers started thinking about the options and possibilities we had to continue our teaching process and to help our students to keep motivated towards learning even with all what the pandemic was leaving us.

State that the best place to start thinking about how to modify the teaching methodology is from the workplace and affirm that teachers can assume the responsibility of contributing to the change starting by taking part of the process. That was what we did.<sup>3</sup>

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Social Belonging**

When talking about needs, Durkheim distinguishes necessary requirements for an organism to stay alive, while wondering how to set the amount of well-being, comfort and luxury that a human being can legitimately pursue. He claims that neither in the organic constitution nor in the psychological constitution of man is there anything that marks a precise limit to such inclinations.

The social needs derived from the practices and functioning of society should therefore find a legitimate source of social regulation and would emanate from an authority before which all would attend. For that reason, that authority could only be society itself, since only it has sufficient authority to declare the right and mark the limits to which they must extend.<sup>4</sup>

The affirmation of social need as a derivation of a moral demand points in Durkheim towards a clearly democratic direction and with a contingent vocation, approaching by virtue of it. In this order of ideas, the agreement between them would be the precise condition to establish framework ideas. Consequently, social belonging has a decisive and peremptory regulatory power that has a concerted origin that will change due to time and place<sup>5</sup>.

Therefore, the effects of training correspond to those who have in their hands the need and the obligation to establish the path, the limits and the conditions on which the educational event will be developed and the way in which knowledge will be consolidated in a social group. Relevance, then, is not purposely proposed, but corresponds to a process reconciled and previously discussed by those who will lead that process.

### **Curricular development**

We assume the concept of curriculum as the process of selection, organization and distribution of the knowledge considered valid to achieve the learning goals.

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<sup>3</sup> Ken Robinson & Lou Aronica, *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education* (UK Penguin Books, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Las reglas del método sociológico* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Olga Kiseleva; Anton Lebedev; Iuliia Pinkovetskaia; Magda Rojas-Bahamón and Diego Arbeláez Campillo, "Specialization and Concentration of Small and Medium Enterprises Employees: Russian Data", *Amazonia Investiga* Vol 8 num 20 (2019): 6-15

Indicates that a curriculum is an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational purpose, so that it remains open to critical discussion and can be effectively translated into practice.<sup>6</sup> It also affirms that it is key to relate culture, society outside of school and education, between inherited knowledge or culture and student learning, between theory (ideas, assumptions and aspirations) and possible practice, given some certain conditions. That is, in educational institutions, the multiple forms of interaction, cultural diversity and social dynamics are revealed, which is why the curriculum becomes the bridge that connects social reality and the school.

In this order of ideas, establishes that the needs of the educational community must first be identified in order to establish a diagnosis and elucidate the needs and their origin and suggest possible solutions to supplement the identified needs.<sup>7</sup> Then, have measurable goals and objectives, select relevant content for education, select and organize teaching experiences, and finally evaluate.

Therefore, attention in the curricular plan is essential for any learning process since it starts from the real needs of the context allowing a strong connection between reality and education.

### **Contextualize the learning process to increase motivation**

Affirm that contextualization is: “a diverse family of instructional strategies designed to more seamlessly link the learning of foundational skills and academic or occupational content by focusing teaching and learning squarely on concrete applications in a specific context that is of interest to the student”. It means that teaching and learning must be focused to the interest and context of the individuals who are involved in it.<sup>8</sup>

Highlight that the curriculum must personalize the education considering that every student has different aptitudes and interest towards learning. To do so, conditions for teachers and students must be settle so as to improve the teaching and learning process. Consequently, the authors affirm that the main aspect in education is to focus on creating the conditions so that students want and can learn. They say that the role of teachers is to facilitate the learning process of the students and the role of the heads of the school is to create the conditions so that teachers can do their job.

Draw attention to the latent need to contextualize the knowledge to the specific and different realities of the regions. This was the attempt of the proposal that was applied in our school.<sup>9</sup>

### **Methodology**

The curricular integration proposal had the following phases:

<sup>6</sup> Nelson López, La De-construcción Curricular. Colección SEMINARIUM (Bogotá: Editorial Magisterio, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Giovanni lafrancesco, Currículo y Plan de Estudios (Bogotá: Cooperativa Editorial Magisterio, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Dolores Perin, “Facilitating Student Learning Through Contextualization”, Community College Research Center (2011): 1-58.

<sup>9</sup> Hernan Pereira & Lucia Ramos, “Diseño de libros de texto para la enseñanza del inglés: una propuesta curricular”, Colomb. Appl. Linguist. J. Vol 8 num 2 (2016): 139-150. Recuperado el 09 de Octubre de 2017, de <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=305746478012>

- 1.- Identification of a problem nucleus and related thematic axes considering the school context.
- 2.- Establishment of areas of articulation based on areas of knowledge.
- 3.- Development of the planning process by set of areas.
- 4.- Application of the learning guides.

Consequently, the model was established as shown in figure 1.

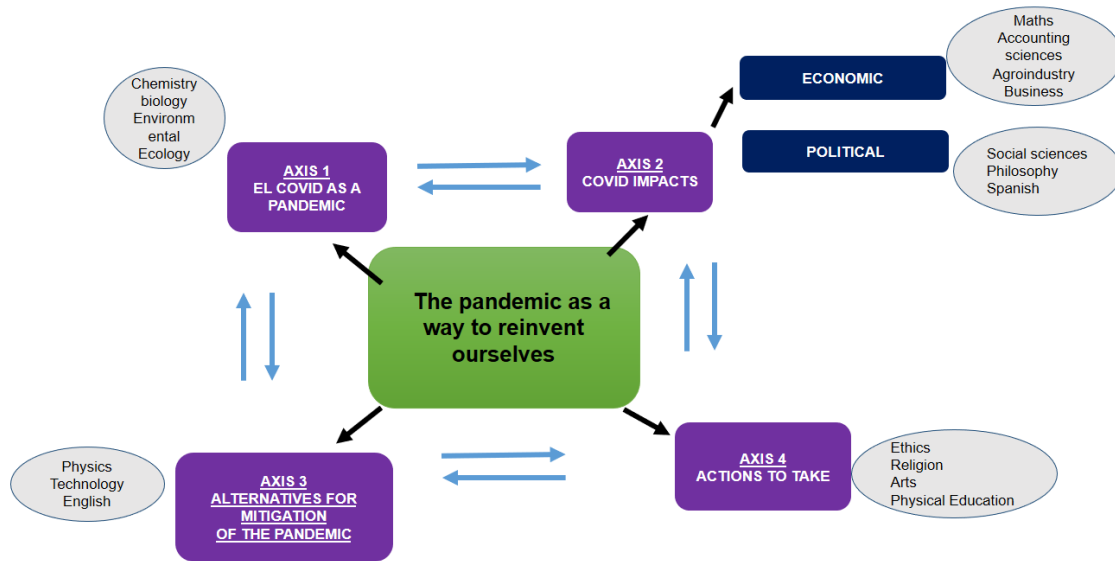


Figure 1  
Curricular articulation model around COVID-19

As can be appreciated, this proposal consisted on working with an interdisciplinary model in which subjects were part of an axis. Each axis had a topic to deal with regarding the main topic: the pandemic as a way to reinvent ourselves. For each axis teachers had to propose questions to guide students into the solution of a problem stated. Accordingly, a proposal of guide to organize the tasks of each axis was created by teachers. This guide included:

- Introduction.
- Objectives.
- Tasks.
- Resources.
- Evidence of learning.
- Assessment Rubric.

Students had to present one evidence of work to each axis. This meant they only had four evidences to deliver, instead of having thirteen. The proposal was presented and approved by the educational community. In accordance with the purpose of the educational process, we sought to teach students to approach the pandemic from scientific aspects, the economic and social impacts, forms of mitigation from the personal and social sphere, the management of personal stress and coexistence in quarantine.

## Results and discussion

Applying a proposal during this time in which all the people are lockdown has been a challenge for teachers and coordinators in our school. On the one side, teachers had to start doing things differently. On the other hand, students were exposed to different changes in the way they take classes.

The proposal implied a change of mind, in which teachers had to reflect on their teaching practices. It also involved that teachers had to get out of the comfort zones and start doing things differently.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of the impact of the guide; since each one had a set of texts, videos or charts to be read, students could reflect on their previous knowledge and acquire the enough knowledge to create the product they should send as evidence of the work developed. Purports that personalizing the materials to teach promote motivation in students because teachers can adapt them and make them more meaningful and attractive to students.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, each team of teachers carefully selected and adapted the materials available about the pandemic so as to add them to the guide model. This work was demanding since there was a huge amount of information online and not all of it was reliable.

Additionally, it was a challenge for teachers to choose mediating elements to interact with students given the needs of the population due to little or no access to the internet. This forced teachers to present two alternatives, one for those who had access to connectivity and other one for those who did not. In this way, virtual guides were articulated through online learning platforms; in our case, the Chamilo platform was used. Other tools that were used for communication were video calls through applications such as Zoom and Google Meet. Likewise, communication means such as email and Whatsapp were implemented. Some students carried out the activities by following them up on printed guides that were sent to their home or picked up at the facilities of the educational institution.

The implementation of virtual media revealed problems related to the need for teachers training in the use of technological tools and their potential pedagogical use, especially in the aspect related to the structuring of online guides. This situation is consistent with the study carried out in the department of Caquetá, which showed significant shortcomings of appropriation by teachers in the use of technological tools as mediation elements for teaching.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding students, their motivation increased because they realized that we, as teacher, cared for them and for their learning process. They noticed all the effort we made to propose the methodology applied. In her research, concludes that motivation is

<sup>10</sup> Iuliia Pinkovetskaia; Diego Arbeláez Campillo; Magda Rojas Bahamón; Tatiana Gromova and Irina Nikitina, "Female Entrepreneurship Development in the Russian Federation", Amazonia Investiga Vol 8 num 18 (2019): 111-18.

<sup>11</sup> Jocelyn Howard & Jae Major, "Guidelines for designing effective English language teaching materials", 9th Conference of Pan Pacific Association of Applied Linguistic Conference (2004): 101–109. Retrieved from: <http://www.paaljapan.org/resources/proceedings/PAAL9/pdf/Howard.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Lillyam López de Parra; Magda Rojas Bahamón; Lucelly Correa Cruz & Diego Arbeláez Campillo, "Normatividad y estrategias de formación de profesores en tecnologías de la información y la comunicación", Revista Academia y Virtualidad Vol 10 num 1 (2017): 79-94



increased if the materials used for teaching are contextualized to students' needs and preferences.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, contextualizing the materials to our students' needs, preferences and to our region, allowed students to be more eager to develop all the tasks assigned because it was less work to be done and also the work was more meaningful in terms of learning and motivation.

Regarding the curricular relevance of the proposal, we could say that the direct and transparent relationship between socially felt needs and the proposals to overcome them is very important in the educational context. In this way, in accordance with what was stated<sup>14</sup>, the social context is fundamental in the learning processes of the students and the problem (topic) addressed in the proposal was of great help to guide the students to face the pandemic with clear knowledge of the subject.

The above is related to the relevance of education. It is frequent to find that the majority of academic plans in the public schools do not have a forceful and satisfactory answer when asked about their relevance. Unfortunately, this situation occurs at the educational levels of basic and middle education, where characteristics such as the lack of a political and cultural educational project are presented. Consequently, approaching the pandemic as a central axis through the process of curricular integration removes the instrumental or operational action naturally established and, consequently, processes of greater cognitive complexity such as critical thinking are generated by the student.

In accordance with the statements<sup>15</sup> made by Arbeláez-Campillo, Tatsiy, Rojas-Bahamón & Danilyan (2020), critical thinking is immersed in the scope and concrete importance of the discourses and practices that are exercised in the fields of intelligent citizenship.

## Conclusions

The pandemic has been an accelerator for thinking, changing and improving. The human being is always in a continuous process of learning. That is what makes our job as teachers to be in a need of constant reflection.

Education also needs to address students' contextual needs and problems. Education cannot be turned away from developments and social needs. It is the duty of the proposals in the institutions to attend to problems inherent to social feeling and to seek the formation of critical citizens and with arguments to act and make decisions. Curricular integration is fundamental in educational processes, not only because it meets the needs of the social context, but also because it articulates mediating elements that facilitate student learning and contribute to the development of contextualized knowledge that allows them to make decisions.

<sup>13</sup> Paola Aguilar-Cruz, "Herramienta multimodal basada en tareas para el aprendizaje del inglés en el grado sexto en Florencia, Caquetá (Colombia)", *Ciencias Sociales y Educación* Vol: 7 num 14 (2018): 65-83. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22395/csye.v7n14a4>

<sup>14</sup> Diego Arbeláez-Campillo; Magda Rojas-Bahamón & Jose Prieto, "Análisis del desempeño escolar de estudiantes de secundaria en función de asignaturas, estrato socioeconómico y conflicto armado", *Amazonia Investiga* Vol: 6 num 10 (2017): 78-87. Retrieved from <https://amazoniainvestiga.info/index.php/amazonia/article/view/723>

<sup>15</sup> Diego Arbeláez-Campillo; Vasyl Tatsiy; Magda Rojas-Bahamón & Oleg Danilyan, "Contributions of critical thinking as a form of participation and political deliberation", *Amazonia Investiga* Vol: 9 num 27 (2020): 5-12. <https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2020.27.03.1>

The methodology presented in this paper evidenced positive results regarding the understanding of how students and their families can face the pandemic. Similarly, on the part of the teachers and coordinators, it made us reflect on the need of incorporating training processes related to the appropriation of technological tools.

A good teacher knows that knowing about their field of education is not enough, because their goal is not to teach a subject, but to help their students to learn. For that reason, teachers need to motivate and inspire their students by creating the conditions for them to do it.

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