Curriculum and students: a historical investigation of this dynamic interactive relationship

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Abstract
In this article, we try to present the scientific tendencies on the students’ role in designing and developing the curriculum in order to highlight the contribution of this process in the improvement of the educational practice. The article is divided into three parts. At the first part, the introduction, we give the student picture according to the interdisciplinary field of sciences of education and the subsequent role of the student in the educational process. The second part presents the alternatives perspectives and trends that emerged (students as researchers, critical pedagogy), that is the gradual path to the stage where the students realise their voice and demand their presence. The article concludes with a quote of the criticism that is mainly based in the postmodern approach and focuses on the ways student voice is created, displayed and legitimised.

Keywords: Students’ voice; Curriculum; Students as researchers; Postmodernism.

I. Introduction
Although the curriculum essentially focuses on the students, who are affected by any choices both regarding objectives and school knowledge and in terms of practices, the role of students in designing, developing or assessing the curriculum has occupied neither educational policy makers, nor theoretical curriculum researchers, except recently. The dominant perception considers the curriculum as a matter that concerns the educators, rather than the students. There are few documented cases of educators attempting to design or even reshape the curriculum in collaboration with their students. It seems that the student voice is not just disregarded, but actually excluded and marginalised. This is why students are usually referred to as the ‘missing voice’ in studies on their role and position in the context of designing and developing the educational act (Cook-Sather, 2002).

II. The modernist approach to student identity
The almost total exclusion of students from decision making and their consequent marginalisation relate to two key parameters. To a great extent, both are the result of the modernist approach to educational reality.

In the 20th century, initially the dominant view of the student was shaped by the emerging pedagogical theories, particularly after the Enlightenment, and also by the scientific findings provided by the dominant behavioural approach to the learning process. The students and their behaviour were the object of any educational process, receivers who ought to accept passively whatever teachers
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Learning was a process that aimed at transferring specific ‘objective’, and therefore indisputable, knowledge. Consequently, learning focused mostly on results, which basically meant changing the student’s behaviour. The imposition of formal knowledge in school, which is not only unconnected to but also often in conflict with informal knowledge, constructed in the framework of the students’ personal experience from interacting with their environment, leads to learning that is formal and out of context. Under such educational conditions, students are merely passive receivers and consumers of prefabricated products, invariably unrelated to their life, which they are called to consume, adopting a specific attitude and behaviour. They are ‘imperfect adults’, immature and therefore unable to make decisions on any aspect of their life, particularly their school life, which aims to make them mature and competent adults, according to weighted and predefined models of success.

The image of students as constructed by pedagogical discourse almost until the 1970s is entirely consistent with the imperatives of modernism; not of rationalisation but of instrumental discourse. That is, the discourse that controls, not enlightens, action: Depersonalised and decontextualised, members of an essentially undifferentiated mass, students must conform to pre-specified tasks. In fact, their success in school depends on their abilities and responsiveness to these tasks. Even the shift of New School towards the student, apart from Dewey’s pragmatism, was actually positivist in orientation; although the focus shifted from the teacher to the student, this did not entail an upgrading of the latter’s role in organising the process. The aim was to explore the main features of childhood, or even the natural predispositions, common to all children, so that they could form the basis for the design of educational action by experts or, in the best case, the educators themselves. The measures taken were almost uniform, responding to the needs of childhood in general. Even the student-centred approaches, focusing on the individual development of each child, were not widely implemented in U.S. education, as the emphasis on individual development could not serve the processes of standardisation.

III. Alternative approaches

Yet, as new approaches gradually emerged in the framework of new epistemological pursuits, leading to alternative orientations in terms of both theories of learning and the scientific approach to the curriculum, new interpretations of the educational reality developed. In an effort to transcend the instrumental and controlling dimension of rationalism, there were attempts to re-attribute meaning to the educational act. Students begin to have a different identity, at least at this level, as they are called to attribute meaning to their actions within the school, and even link them to their actions outside school, i.e. their experiences and cultural practices. Students are no longer considered the object of strategic intents, but active social subjects, producing coherent meaning. In this way, they obtain a more interventional role, both in the educational process and in the acquisition of knowledge.

Specifically, the constructivist theories of cognitive development contribute decisively to this upgrading of the role of the student, with the shift from viewing learning as a transfer, to viewing learning as constructing. Interest shifts from rote
learning to understanding and interpreting, i.e. to meaningful learning, and therefore to the development of intellectual skills and cognitive or metacognitive strategies. In this context, the whole range of the students’ experiences is utilised, taking account of non-formal learning environments, and placing particular emphasis on how each student learns. Students are turned from objects into subjects, who learn how to utilise their dynamic action in order to approach knowledge, master how to move in the world, distinguish their available options and shape their identity (Frydaki, 2009). Students actually become active creators of knowledge, and thus control the learning process. In fact, certain constructivists claim that the educational process can be substantially enhanced, if educators decide to listen to and take account of what the students themselves have to say about their learning, i.e. if the students become “authors of their own understanding and assessors of their own learning” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 5).

A decisive factor in this shift was the challenging of the natural character of the linear top-down development of the curriculum, which resulted from the anti-positivist epistemology that was gradually being shaped. Alternatives for curriculum development were proposed, involving all participants in the educational process – educators, students and the school as an independent unit – throughout all processes, from design to assessment. In such a theoretical and practical orientation, the positivist perspective and the resulting educational practice are criticised, mainly for being stationary and restrictive, but also for imposing a dichotomy on the relationship between theory and practice.

The alternative models suggested and tested in this context are not only a turning point for the philosophy of curriculum design, but also a proposal that recognises a completely different place for the student. In this emerging new context, Rudduck notes: “If we are to be true to the new language of curriculum reform – ‘student-centred learning’, ‘negotiated curriculum’, ‘transforming the expectation of students’ – then we have to consider the part students play in the curriculum change” (Rudduck, 1987, p. 12, in Ghaill, 1992, p. 221).

In this alternative perspective, two orientations developed:

The first one stemmed from the teacher research movement, which progressively triggered the creation of a new tendency, gradually developing into a clearly delimited and developed movement. It is an effort to activate the student voice through their participation in the process of educational change, which progressively developed and became more organised, through the research trend ‘students as researchers’. Students are not just enabled to express their opinion and intervene drastically. They take a very important step; not only do they claim to define not only the educational issues under study, but also their participation in this process, and the utilisation of the resulting findings (Fielding, 2004).

The second one relates directly to the movement of Critical Pedagogy. Already in its radical stage, the movement focused to student awareness and transformation, in the framework of viewing education as a political and social practice (Taylor & Robinson, 2009). The role of the students is upgraded in all processes, in a liberated framework, dominated by the concepts of empowerment and collectivity. Students gradually become aware of social injustice, realise their power, and intervene so as to change both society and their place in it. In other words, they become aware of their voice and claim their presence by revealing it.
III.1. Enabling the student voice

III.1.1. Educational action research: Students as evaluators of the educational act and the curriculum

Introducing the research perspective of curriculum development, Stenhouse supported that students would do better in school if they were treated with respect, and if their ideas were heard and taken seriously (Stenhouse, 1975). In this way, the teacher research movement was associated, from the beginning, to upgrading the role of the student in promoting school change, which includes curriculum design and development. Already in the 1980s, Kemmiss and McTaggart report that educational action research involves all participants in its improvement, expanding the collaboration group, to include not only those who are directly concerned, but as many as possible of the individuals affected by the practices under study (Kemmiss & McTaggart, 1988).

In many action research projects, students were called to evaluate design in the context of triangulation. During the first stages of development of the teacher research movement, they functioned more as sources of data, as they were called to evaluate aspects of the curriculum after it had been developed. However, this participation actually constitutes the first systematic effort to reveal their voice. Of course, increasingly more research projects utilising educational action research started to view students as members of the research group and ask them to participate even in the initial design. Practical and mostly emancipatory educational action research presupposes the attribution of a more interventional role to the student when conducting action research, in some cases even during curriculum development. Yet this always occurred in the context of collaboration with teacher researchers, who were the ones to choose the issues under study and take the final decisions on designing and reforming the respective curriculum.

III.1.2. Curriculum negotiation: Students as active participants

The concept of curriculum negotiation serves the same logic of collaboration between educator and students for curriculum development. Boomer et al (1992) describe such a negotiation process: in the beginning of each module, educators collaborate with their students to determine what the students already know about the subject, what they want to find out, in which way, and how they will evaluate this study and the resulting knowledge. Similarly, Shor (1996) begins a series of lessons by asking his students to jointly define the syllabus and gradually investigate the quality of the chosen activities and the content throughout the semester.

Curriculum negotiation is a proposal that is actually aligned with the logic of educational action research, as the negotiation involves the students in the process of curriculum design and then invites them to investigate the process of its development (Sproston, 2008). Boomer et al (1992) match the phases of action research and curriculum negotiation with the students:

Curriculum negotiation:
Planning → Negotiating → Teaching & Learning → Performing → Evaluating.

Educational Action Research:
Planning → Acting → Observing → Reflecting → Evaluating.

The negotiation process can follow two directions:

In the first case, the students can choose from a range of specific options, proposed by the educator, who controls the process completely. It is a rather technical process, which includes the students without actually involving them in curriculum development. Students take decisions only at the level of choosing among completely controlled versions of the curriculum (Tsafos, 2009). In this context, the student voice and participation is limited to providing adult educators information about how they can better cater for their students’ education and progress. This is what Rudduck defines as consultation, i.e.: “a form of student voice that is purposeful, is undertaken in some kind of partnership with teachers, and is usually initiated by teachers” (Rudduck, 2007, p. 590).

In the second case, students undertake a primary role in the process of curriculum design and development, mostly in issues that concern its form and content (Grundy, 1987). This process actively undermines the educator’s power, as educators develop the curriculum jointly with their students, and therefore share the control of the development of learning (Grundy, 1987). Students are emancipated from their dependence on the educator, both in terms of the subjects that constitute the curriculum content and regarding the process of their negotiation. In this type of negotiation, students enter the realm of participation, which, according to Rudduck, “is about involving students in aspects of school’s work and development through committees and working parties […] At classroom level, participation is about opportunities for decision making and having choices and about understanding and managing your own learning priorities” (Rudduck, 2007, p. 590). This collective decision-making in a reflective and research framework upgrades the students’ role substantially.

Many writers refer to the positive function of this version of curriculum development, putting forward a series of arguments. Onore (in Boomer et al., 1992) observes that the negotiation process nurtures the students’ involvement, investigation and reflection, processes which themselves contribute to maximising learning. It is also claimed that the sense of experimentation at classroom level and the fact that the students control this process to a certain extent provides them with internal motivation. They don’t feel that they are the object of an investigation, but that they too participate in a process of evolving and enhancing the educational process, which they assess and evaluate (Thiessen, 1992). Supported in a process of thinking and assuming responsibility, students have the opportunity to express their attitudes and experiences, perhaps even to understand the former and process the latter (Boomer et al., 1992). In this manner, they might show more interest for what they are going to learn, since they will have chosen it, in a way, and so the learning process will become meaningful to them (Boomer et al., 1992).

Nevertheless, the attitude of students towards the curriculum negotiation process did not confirm the researchers’ initial optimism. In her book Negotiating the Curriculum, published in 1982, with many examples of curriculum development by the students, Gosgrove describes a range of reactions to the invitation to negotiate:

Firstly there are those students who are thankful and amazed when they realise that at last they will be able to learn in the way they know they can learn … Other
students view the offer with suspicion, because they don’t really think that I will go through with it. They don’t trust me. They approve of my attitude, but their experience with teachers allowing them to make decisions about what they will do is not vast. They think that I am ‘conning’ them… There are those students who are dismayed at the whole idea, because they cannot understand how they will learn anything if I or someone else does not tell them what to do… Finally, there are those students who react with contempt. In their opinion I am shirking my responsibility by not giving the class a prescription for learning (the teacher is expert) and allowing the students to help each other (after all, that’s cheating) (Cosgrove, 1982, in Grundy, 1987, pp. 123-124).

III.1.3. Students as (action) researchers: towards a radical intervention

The tendency to promote students as action researchers can be traced to 1990s, initially in the framework of the teacher research movement (Atweh et al., 1998). With the main argument that students can and must have a voice in a process that concerns them (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004) and under the influence of the emerging discourse to reveal and actively listen to the ‘student voice’ (Rudduck et al., 1996), new research discourses emerged. These discourses provided the groundwork for the design and implementation of research projects, in which students started not only to have a more active role, but also in some cases to assume the responsibility of the educational research. They actually become action researchers.

Various ways have been proposed for students to be able to either organise educational action research projects themselves, with educators in just a supportive role, or collaborate with educators and actively participate in the action research that takes place in their schools and classrooms. In both cases, the aim is to draw conclusions that will allow them to improve the educational process on the one hand, and to identify the necessary conditions for schools to support such practices on the other hand. In these cases, students do not simply participate as sources of information, but as actual researchers, with educators either supporting them and facilitating the research process or collaborating with them in a joint research project.

Atwehand Burton (1995) describe projects in which students were invited to participate as ‘equal’ partners in research groups that also included academics and school educators. More recently, educational action research organised by students has multiplied, and it is no longer limited to small scale classroom projects, but also includes research spanning many school districts and communities. Research projects conducted in this context (Cooper & McIntyre, 1996, Rudduck et al., 1996) show that the changes proposed by students on specific curriculum points, when asked for their opinion, are particularly interesting. The findings of these projects demonstrated that students were able to observe and comment in an analytical, penetrating and constructive fashion (Rudduck et al., 1996). Rudduck, an academic who has contributed significantly to this student-centred research discourse (Fielding, 2007), proposes that we should “identify opportunities for participation, at the consultative level at least, within the framework of the National Curriculum” (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000, p. 84).
This trend, developed in the framework of educational action research, evolved into a more organised form through the movement of ‘students as researchers’, a research initiative in which:

Students themselves identified issues they saw as important in their daily experience of schooling and with the support of the staff in facilitating and enabling roles, gathered data, made meaning together and put forward subsequent recommendations for change shared with their fellow students, with staff and with the governing body of the school (Fielding, 2001, p. 125).

Rubin and Jones (2007) give an overview of the evolution of this trend, noting significant benefits for students, schools and the communities to which the students belong:

- Building important academic skills,
- Building social capital,
- Familiarising students with research methods,
- Engaging disenfranchised youth,
- Empowering and motivating for active participation in schools and communities,
- Providing access to critical skills,
- Developing empowered civic identity

And it is important that the students’ role has gradually started to be differentiated. In most of the described research cases, the students themselves were researchers or co-researchers. This means that they collaborated either with their educators or with their peers, as a discrete group, which determined the process to a great extent. In this way, they were not simply the object of the research, but became, according to Fielding, the very agents of their transformation (2004). This entails not only the upgrading of their role, but also the gradual establishment of an alternative research practice, which could contribute to an equally alternative curriculum development.

Although few research projects dealt directly with the curriculum, most of the issues studied by the students concerned teaching methods or matters of content, that is important curriculum elements. However, it is argued that the process of curriculum design and development in the context of a research project with the interventional participation – or even under the coordination – of students, not only contributed significantly to meeting the expectations of both educators and students, but also had a positive impact on the learning process itself. The students provided a lot of data that substantially determined the learning process, their own assessment, even the selection of textbooks (Bovill et al., 2009).

It has also been claimed that recognising the student voice is a milestone, not only for curriculum development but also for education in general, as it is based on the principle of operating schools democratically, which could lead to a reinforcement of democratic structures in society in general.

Encouraging young people to find a voice and to learn the practices of cooperative agency is fundamental to the revitalisation of our schools as learning communities within a democratic society. Are we creating a new order of experience for students in schools, new roles for teachers and students—or will the idea of consulting students prove to be little more than a passing fashion, a tokenistic nod in the direction of consumerism? (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006, p. 229).
This democratic practice emerges from the paradigm shift both in terms of the students’ role and regarding how the educational act is organised in general.

The pupil voice movement represents a new departure, because it is based on the premise that schools should reflect the democratic structures in society at large. Under this conception the school becomes a community of participants engaged in the common endeavour of learning. Similarly, where the pupil voice is attended to, learning comes to be seen as a more holistic process with broad aims rather than a progression through a sequence of narrowly focused performance targets (Rudduck & Fielding, 2004, p. 135).

Of course the transition from the student-machine, who responds accurately to the detailed design of the educational process, to the students-subject, who wishes to assume the responsibility of personally constructing and attributing meaning to knowledge, is neither automatic nor immediate. Indicatively, Felten reports about the students’ attitude towards the invitation to become actively involved in designing the educational process:

Time is absolutely essential in the empowerment process. We have found that it often takes time for students to develop the confidence – and the language – to express pedagogical ideas clearly. Many seem at first to doubt that we will take them seriously. In most course design projects, a moment comes when students suddenly realise that they are being heard. We have begun to structure our course design projects to include an early and public point...when students are making an important decision, such as selecting the textbook. This moment typically changes the dynamic of the design group, empowering students to be active participants and showing faculty the value of listening to students (Felten, in Bovill et al., 2008, p. 88).

A gradual familiarisation is therefore deemed necessary, and, as seen above, it has to be accompanied by the respective change in school culture. Initially, this is because the invitation to participate and assume responsibility may create feelings of insecurity and therefore trigger the students’ resistance (Rudduck, 1991). Moreover, when a whole school continues to operate based on the modernist principles of predictability, control and objectivity, it can only lead to obstacles to upgrading the students’ role. Therefore, new interpretative and critical – in essence anti-positivistic – orientations can only develop gradually and under specific conditions.

III.2. The critical orientation: Empowering students so as to reveal their voice

In this context, Critical Pedagogy suggests a more radical orientation. A main principle of Critical Pedagogy is to empower students through alternative teaching practices, so as to transform both the self and the community in general, in the perspective of a more just society. Freire was the first to promote social constructivism and emancipatory education as an alternative to the logic of banking education and the transmission of pre-selected knowledge (Freire, 1972). According to Freire, the world of subjects (teachers) and objects (students) of the educational process, which was determined by a relationship of hierarchy and power, could be transformed into a world of ‘informed subjects’ (teachers and students), who collectively investigate how to change their environment. Students must be willing to risk, to get into an adventure, or they will be able neither to create nor to recreate (Freire, 1998).
This upgrading of the students' role, based on Freire's deep conviction about the importance of their cultural context for curriculum development, led to an alternative practice. The process of curriculum design could not be conducted without engaging the people it involved. Therefore, joint design was necessary in such an orientation, a design based on dialogue:

Through dialogue the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teacher. The teacher is no longer merely the one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in their turn, while being taught, also teach (Freire, 1972, p. 53).

The aim of these educators is to empower their students, so as to create a fair and just society for all, at peace both internally and with other nations (McNeil, 1999). The educator invites the students to examine problems and construct their solutions, co-creating the curriculum. Educators invite students to investigate problems and construct these investigations, co-creating the curriculum.

Typically, students are expected to look at situations with such questions as the following in mind. What is happening? How did it get this way? Whose interests are served by it? Whose interests are not? What are the consequences of the practice? Or text? What are its underlying assumptions? (McNeil, 1999, p. 75).

The Interdisciplinary Project developed by Freire is such an example. In a truly student-centred framework, practice develops based on student experience. The ultimate goal was a democratic classroom, where teachers and students are closely related in a process of collective construction of new knowledge, which draws on both popular and formal sources. However, such a shift requires on the one hand a change in the educators' perceptions of their students and their role and on the other hand a reform of the knowledge acquisition process itself. For Freire, this shift can be achieved through the dialogue between students and educators and a flexible design, which would allow its reform in practice, with the intervention of both educators and students.

Students' active participation in the educational act, through the opportunity they are offered to express their voice, became a main principle of Critical Pedagogy. Critical Pedagogy reveals how the voices of some students are excluded, and promotes a language of empowerment, seeking ways to reveal these voices. For Critical Pedagogy, "a radical theory of voice signifies the social and the political formations that provide students with the experiences, language, histories and stories that construct the subject positions that they use to give meaning to their lives" (Giroux, 1991, p. 100). In a theory of resistance, Aronowitz and Giroux (1993) introduce a curriculum design that is grounded in the culture of the classroom, the students' knowledge and the social practices that validate it. Students are given the necessary space to move based on their own knowledge and experiences, as the institutional framework takes account of their cultural capital and allows them to express their voice. This enables students not only to express their experiences but also to critically explore them in the perspective of critical consciousness and empowerment.

Of course the student voice expresses a social self, created and shaped in a plethora of different social contexts. Critical Pedagogy argues that these voices are shaped in an oppressive society, which advantageously promotes and
legitimises the meanings and values of certain groups, undermining those of others. The aim of this social practice is to impose a specific perspective, marginalising any alternative. In this way, the voices of the students demonstrate contradictions, as they emerge from a specific social framework, in which many different, even conflicting, discourses are developed. This is why the aim of critical pedagogy is not only to express student voice in the classroom, but also to explore it critically; to reveal the constructed understandings and the underlying contradictions. Giroux sums up this critical-reflective practice:

Developing a pedagogy that takes the notion of student voice seriously means developing a critically affirmative language that works both with and on the experiences that students bring to the classroom. This means taking seriously and confirming the language forms, modes of reasoning, dispositions, and histories that give students an active voice in defining the world; it also means working on the experiences of such students in order for them to examine both their strengths and weaknesses (Giroux, 1991, p. 104).

The suggested Border Crossing, in the context of Critical Pedagogy, moves in this direction, as on the one hand it validates the voices brought by all students while on the other it entails the collective involvement, with others, to a pedagogical framework that helps redefine the limits and rewrite the complex narratives that constitute an individual's life (Giroux, 1988). In such a pedagogical framework, students seek, find and realise their voice, as well as the voice of others. In this way, they understand that their narratives are embedded in wider social and political narratives (Giroux, 1992). Such a process does not simply reinforce their voice, but helps them approach it critically, investigate the cultural and social parameters that influence, and even expand and reshape it: “It means offering students the knowledge and social relations that enable them to critically read not only how cultural texts are regulated by various discursive codes, but also how such texts express and represent different ideological interests” (Giroux, 1992, p. 135).

The aim is therefore to establish an educational and simultaneously political project, in which students can be organised in the perspective of change and transformation.

McBeath reveals the power of this border pedagogy, describing a physical and intellectual journey beyond the limits of classroom, home, culture and school learning, in the context of a Project called “Learning School”:

It was through these experiences that the Learning School students came to reflect on their own formative experience and the degree to which their own schooling had allowed their own voice to be heard and, in a deeper sense, to apprehend what ‘voice’ could mean and the sense of self which it expressed. Through the articulation of their own inner voices, in their own biographies, we gain new insights as to how identities shape and reform as they travel between home and classroom and across cultures. It is in these ‘border crossings’ (Giroux, 1992) that we begin to apprehend something of identity as a process rather than an entity, as with each new challenge to their world view these young people find new meanings and new facets of selfhood (McBeath, 2006, p. 196).

In this framework, in which the learning process results from the negotiation between educator and students, recognising joint and mutual power to both (Shor, 1992), the participation of students in curriculum decision-making allows them to overcome the institutional barriers that operate against the emancipatory
perspective of students participating actively in curriculum development. A main prerequisite is the organised dialogue between educators and students, which "might serve to empower both groups at a time of radical reconstruction of the school system that is underpinned by market-led principles of intensified stratification differentiation, hierarchy and social exclusion" (Ghaill, 1992, p. 231).

In this way, not only are students active in constructing their knowledge, they also reflect critically on injustice and social inequality. Moreover, they critically approach knowledge beyond their personal experience, so as to expand their understanding of the world, with the potential of changing their naturalised perceptions about how they live (McLaren, 1989). The aim is to commit to the cause of redistributing power not only in the classroom, between educator and students, but in society at large (Cook Sather, 2002).

Kincheloe lucidly summarises the benefits for the participants in a project, in which students engaged in active intervention through research, in an attempt to realise and promote their voice, in the perspective of wider social change (2007):

- Producing meaningful knowledge, as a result of utilising the students' informal knowledge in the curriculum.
- Producing knowledge controlled not by political, social, cultural and financial elites, but by the students themselves, who are recognised as worthy producers of knowledge.
- Challenging the normative type of education, through the students' active involvement both in knowledge production and in criticising and denaturalising dominant knowledge.
- Helping students realise how the dominant groups construct and formalise knowledge through education.
- Developing new forms of meta-learning, as students engage in knowledge construction processes that facilitate their cognitive and intellectual development.
- Endowing students with a critical orientation, through processes of self-awareness and the shaping of subjectivities.

And Kincheloe concludes that "student research is a profoundly practical activity that helps critical teachers move beyond 'what is' to 'what could be'. In an alienated, neo-colonial, hegemonised era such work has never been more difficult and important" (Kincheloe, 2007, p. 772).

IV. Criticism

The criticism on the above regards the following:

- The students’ participation in the research process of curriculum development

Many argue that this participation is essentially symbolic, since the actual control belongs to the educator or external researcher. Students' participation in collecting data or composing reports cannot be considered 'genuine' research activity, as the knowledge they contribute does not lead to decision-making or the resolution of real problems (Atweh, 2003). The equal participation in curriculum design and in exploring its development through formative assessment
presupposes a change in the relationship between educator and students. Yet the literature refers to the educators’ refusal to relinquish their privileges and delegate the control of the educational process (Bovill et al., 2009). Here the educators’ authoritarian intervention, whether conscious or not, can be decisive in giving a specific orientation to the students’ requests and suggestions (Fielding, 2004).

- The lack of a collaboration and participation culture in schools

As they are organised in an individualistic and competitive way, categorising students based on school norms, schools cannot support a process of deliberation and participation (Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001). Moreover, the authoritarian discourse on total control over knowledge (Kincheloe, 2007), along with the request for immediate effectiveness and monitoring through measurable performance indicators that dominates school practice and determines the demands of pressure groups to a great extent, is not compatible with the participatory and collaborative practice of curriculum development (Frost, 2008). Teachers will most probably hesitate to oppose this discourse in their effort to allow the expression of the student voice, in a truly emancipatory orientation of curriculum development (Taylor & Robinson, 2009). Most importantly, schools completely lack a collaborative culture, as they are dominated by power relationships, which do not allow for reflection and review. To quote Cook-Sather, “Listening does not always mean doing exactly what we are told, but it does mean being open to the possibility of revision, both of thought and action. At a minimum, it means being willing to negotiate” (2002, p. 5).

- The authenticity of the student voice

In a critical postmodern framework, the authenticity of this voice is disputed. Already in the 1990s, Shor had noted that “unless we can create a climate that is sufficiently politically conscious and critical, we must resist the temptation to glamorise student voices because they are likely to be deeply imbued with status quo values” (Shor, in Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 7). This brings into question the authenticity of this voice in the given normative social and educational framework, from which their experiences emerge (Mannion, 2007). And the resulting questions are: To which extent are students really given the opportunity to reflect critically on the views they express? Ultimately, how can we warrant the necessary contemplative and reflective climate in both classroom and school? (Hadfield & Haw, 2001).

- Equal opportunities for the expression of all voices

Several researchers refer to the complexity of classroom dynamics and the difficulty to create a community of learning with all students as active participants. Democratic dialogue is also a demanding process, as the classroom does not offer a democratic framework, not even in this emancipatory approach. The voices of students are many. Some of them, particularly the alternative ones, remain marginalised even in the context of power redistribution. The dominant voices are the ones to prevail. In their efforts, educators will have to deal with what is explicit and feasible in this context. For instance, addressing Orner’s question “Whose interests are served when students speak?” Alverman et al.
V. Tsafos (1997) note, based on their classroom experience, that it is not easy to overcome the discourse practices that reproduce gender stereotypes in the school (Cook-Sather, 2002).

- The perceptions of educators and students regarding the curriculum

Regarding their perceptions of the curriculum (Bovill et al., 2009), both students and educators, based on their experience, usually have a very specific perception of the curriculum, the dominant perception on the given material package to be transmitted. Even if they are willing to comment on any curriculum choice, whether regarding content or method, they are unable to propose another version, as they are usually unaware of the alternative ways of building and developing or constructing knowledge, and the different values latent in teach choice (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000).

V. Conclusion

Of course the above criticism mainly relates to the modernist environment and the restrictions it imposes, as well as with the inability of subjects involved in this process to overcome the imposed modernist practice. Several researchers who approach educational reality from a postmodern perspective focus their criticism mainly on the ways in which this voice is constructed, revealed and legitimised.

Of course, all these reservations do not entail the rejection of the new student-centred discourse and student voice. However, they do imply that educators should demonstrate less enthusiasm and more self-research and reflective deliberation in their attempt to empower their students by redistributing power in the classroom. As Cook-Sather points out, these reservations offer two important contributions to revealing the student voice discourse:

The first is that they all include student perspectives in the larger policy – and practice–shaping conversations from which students are generally excluded but which determine their lives in school. The second is that many of them make visible the difficulties and contradictions as well as the illuminations that attend such are – informing of conversations about educational policy and practice (Cook-Sather 2002, p. 7).

In the context of reshaping power relationships in the classroom, upgrading the students’ role when interacting with their teacher during seeking and constructing knowledge can reshape not only the conditions but also the aim of this interaction: “School communities should be places where we can establish ‘common knowledge’ or common basic values and beliefs, which will be intersubjectively controlled, while also legitimising pluralism and subjective perspectives” (Frydaki, 2009, p. 238).

Notes

1. In this context, the term ‘voice’ refers to participation and empowerment and relates to the students’ level of participation and the opportunity they are given to express it. “The term ‘pupil voice’ has, in recent years, become part of a wider discourse but trends to refer to a limited conception of young people’ having a say’ within the bounds of school convention” (McBeath, 2006, p. 195).
References


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