

Cooperative Teaching Practices

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The educational challenges of diverse and multicultural societies require responses from a socio-critical approach that analyses reality from broad perspectives such as cultural pluralism that permeates educational interventions, including teaching practices. This is a multidimensional process that requires continuous communication and cooperation processes.

multiculturalism

cultural pluralism

teacher collaboration

cultural diversity

1. Introduction

The primary legislation governing higher education is Law 3/2003 of 28 March, on Universities in Castilla y León (BOCYL of 23 April 2003), and Law 12/2010 of 28 October, which amends Law 3/2003 of 28 March, on Universities in Castilla y León (BOCYL of 10 November 2010). These laws establish the framework for academic, territorial, financial, and coordination regulations for the Universities of Castilla y León, including the principle of “Specific cooperation with all Ibero-American Universities”. Globalisation in all areas, including education, both benefits and requires the overcoming of territorial barriers and enables teaching in bi-national contexts.

In this regard, the University of Salamanca introduced the Master's Programme in Teacher Training and Development (referred to as MPTTD) seven years ago. This Master's degree has some special characteristics as it is delivered in a blended learning format by faculty from the University of Salamanca (Spain) to Ecuadorian teachers who conduct their in-person practical training in their home country. Moreover, Ecuador operates under two distinct educational systems with different calendars, the Sierra-Amazon and Coast regimes. The Coastal regime includes all coastal cities and Galapagos, such as Gualaquiza, Esmeraldas, Portoviejo, Manta, and Santo Domingo. This regime starts classes in May of each year and ends in February of the following year. The Sierra regime includes the entire inter-Andean region and the Amazon, i.e., cities such as Quito, Tulcán, Ambato, Riobamba, and Cuenca. In this case, the academic year runs from September to June of the following year. In addition to differences in the timetable, there are other factors that make these two regions different, such as their dialects or differences in population density (higher in the coastal areas than in the highlands). All these differences imply two major subcultures that are also reflected in the education system.

Practical teaching experiences are a key element that provide a privileged opportunity to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and the reality of the classroom. Since its inception, the MPTTD Practicum has followed a progressive sequence of reflection, awareness, time commitment, engagement, and student involvement in a wide range of school contexts and educational situations.

The objective of this Practicum is to immerse students in the specific context of teaching and learning. This entails transferring the knowledge, information, skills, and competences acquired during the programme into real teaching practice to improve the quality of training.

The Practicum is worth 12 European ECTS credits and is conducted over two months. This period of work experience varies between the Coastal and Highland regimes and requires a differentiated planning.

The organisation of the Practicum involves a team composed of Coordinators from the three specialisations in the Master's Programme (Language and Literature, Biology, and Learning Difficulties), the Practicum Coordinator, academic tutors from the University of Salamanca, and on-site tutors (educators from the schools where the activity takes place). Co-tutors, an educational entity composed of Ecuadorian professionals (Sigue-E), facilitate communication and interaction between academic tutors, on-site tutors, and the Practicum Coordinator.

2. The Sociocultural Dimension of Education: The Socio-Critical Approach

Émile Durkheim stated that “common education is a function of the social state; for each society seeks to realise in its members, through education, an ideal specific to it” ^[1]. The role of education within a society is unquestionable, and it is considered a significant driver of development.

According to Bourdieu ^[2], the social space or organisation of society is grounded in cultural capital, which is the cultural heritage of that social space. Thus, society is organised around specific values that explain its structure. Consequently, the social space becomes a symbolic space that, when transformed into a kind of language, shapes the perspectives, priorities, ideologies, and interests of the components of each social group. In this way, the distribution of cultural capital allows the construction of a social space, and the educational institution, by promoting particular ways of understanding the world, aids in reproducing and maintaining it over time and history. This is only possible through the transmission of concepts from person to person, a communicative process through which each society and culture's unique perspectives on the world are assimilated.

Education serves as a platform for the transmission and reproduction of various social relationships, but it is also a space where forms of reaction and opposition are generated, stemming from questions about society. This aligns with the idea that education should not only produce professionals but also compassionate, conscious, and critical citizens who not only reproduce the established social system but also contribute to its improvement with a transformative spirit ^[3].

Human capital results from a complex process of appropriation in which individuals are introduced into the prevailing culture. This concept ties in with the aspiration to seek more reflective and critical educational practices that raise awareness of the social and cultural roles played by educators and learners ^[4]. Consequently, teacher training cannot be a mere review of didactic formulas or specific discipline training; it must be the space that

welcomes the teacher's concern for transcending the place where, through reflection and analytical skills, they can clarify their position regarding educational issues and their role in the social dynamic.

These premises amplify the complexity of managing and implementing teaching practices between two countries with similarities but also significant cultural and educational differences.

Institutions of higher education must strive for integral human development, aiming to prevent, alleviate, and improve situations caused by marginalisation and social exclusion. These situations affect various groups who, due to the deficiencies in their environment, are forced to confront daily risks arising from neglect, maladjustment, exclusion, drug addiction, violence, social conflict, and delinquency. The United Nations advocates international cooperation in support of teacher training, particularly to assist the most vulnerable groups ^[5]. Training and capacity-building for interculturality is a priority for both the Ecuadorian ^[6] and Spanish ^[7] education systems.

Multicultural coexistence is a current reality that requires a preventative approach to education, preparing immigrants and host citizens for a new situation, fostering adaptation processes based on respect and mutual enrichment. Globalising processes generate significant migratory flows not only of economically disadvantaged individuals but also of professionals, including teachers who practice their profession outside their country of origin. From this perspective, universities and schools must propose common programmes that encompass all aspects that will shape the emergence of an intercultural vision of education, considering aspects such as ethnocentrism ^[8] or xenocentrism.

| 3. The Multicultural Model as a Frame

The cultural pluralism approach has been applied to the analysis of acculturation processes through networks ^[9], religious inclusion ^[10], and even cultural integration processes ^[11].

Intercultural education is a necessity in changing societies, and educational processes must assume a central role in the processes of social change and reorganization ^[12].

In this global context of multicultural realities, different educational models emerge (assimilationist, segregationist, compensatory, and cultural pluralism).

The aim of this model is to train all students (from both majority and minority cultures) to adapt to and learn about social reality based on multicultural competence. It requires fluid communication and collaboration processes between cultures.

Banks ^[13] incorporates into this model a broad curriculum perspective that addresses global contexts by encouraging critical analysis and reflection on social reality by all the actors who make up the school scenario. The intercultural approach is integrated with the socio-critical approach mentioned in the previous section.

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4. The Coordination of Teachers and Other Educational Stakeholders

There is widespread consensus regarding the significance of teacher collaboration and coordination in promoting innovation and improvement processes in schools ^{[14][15]}. The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) studies, in which Spain has participated to date ^{[16][17][18]}, emphasise teacher collaboration as one of the key elements in everyday teaching work. Similarly, some authors ^[19] highlight the positive association between teacher collaboration, professional development, and academic results.

With increasing intensity, researchers, educators, and educational institutions are advocating for greater coordination among all the involved stakeholders. Given the heterogeneity of educational contexts, the diversity of school types, cultural variations, and international collaborations, the need for new structures and collaboration strategies becomes imperative. These must go beyond traditional views of school management and organisation ^[20].

Numerous studies have strived to demonstrate that teacher coordination opens up new opportunities for professional development supported by shared reflections on the intricacies of classroom practice. This facilitates and provides resources for learning within and from classroom practice ^{[21][22]}.

However, cooperation should not be limited solely to teachers, as numerous educational stakeholders are involved in the teaching and learning processes ^[23]. More specifically, in curricular practices, there is a requirement for the institutionalisation of an agreement that regulates a student's immersion in an educational institution with a very specific role. This process involves collaboration between the school's directors and administrative personnel on one hand, and the counterpart personnel, which is the higher education institution that educates the students and its own institutional structure. In the case under consideration, the organisational complexity is compounded by the physical distance and educational differences between Spain and Ecuador.

The role of school administrators in educational centres has been identified by various studies as crucial in creating collaborative working environments ^{[24][25]}. However, there are also studies that raise concerns about the effects of hierarchical power dynamics that limit the potential for teaching improvement and innovation ^{[26][27]}.

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