

## **Radical Education**

### **Introduction**

In some conceptualizations of radical education, popular education is integrated, particularly with reference to Paulo Freire, as another element from a diversity of disruptive pedagogical practices. In the case of Ecuador, popular education is not separated from intercultural bilingual education, which in turn constitutes the main referent of the local educational struggle. I have tried in this text to open a space to understand the importance of discussing other educational practices which are linked to local social processes that have remained outside, or in less visible positions in relation to popular and intercultural bilingual education. I present this as a possible place of exploration, I feel that I'm sharing coordinates which far from leading us to a certain place, they would allow us to explore. As a matter of fact, in the writing process this text has transformed itself from a set of interviews and common questions to a document outlined in two parts.

Initially, I have tried to place references and move forward to the complex places from which we construct educational discourses linked to radical education, emphasizing on institutional references to identify those spaces yet to be explored from other pedagogical perspectives. We have put together a memory which recognizes some references about radical education from a local perspective, which is shared by some other colleagues.

### **What do we understand as Radical Education? – A general framework.**

We could say that radical education, outlined in different fields of socio-educational knowledge in the 60's and 70's, arises parallel to social reproduction and structuralism thinking (Althusser/Bourdieu), which in these decades took a certain role in the social and political analysis of what we can call the countercultural movements (Carbonell Sebarroja, 2015, Giroux, 2004). Its defiant look at the deep processes of academic institutionalization at the turn of the century, raises questions such as what is education?

Where is it learned and taught? Who learns and who teaches? And what should be taught? These are now relevant discussions in the center of the political organization of grassroots movements.

We could say that these processes are paradoxical since they are related to the configuration of education organizations such as UNESCO or the OECD. Those institutions are regulators of international education policies that generate greater visibility and, at the same time, tension in the education dynamics between the state and civil organization (Velez V., 2002).

I think it is important to recognize this general framework of radical education in order to emphasize its history narrated from the tension between institutionalism and social struggles, its relation with education democratization, the schooling process and its permanent standardization. In this sense, we can say that in the 70's these were the factors that structured a discourse and the conditions so that the disputes could be placed in one of the two tension points, especially in the field of Education Studies.

### **Why thinking about radical education in our context?**

When I reflected upon the spaces of educational resistance, transformation milestones, reforms, and local autonomous processes, it was impossible not to think about intercultural bilingual education as the main referent and the experiences of popular education<sup>1</sup>. Then I wondered, why thinking about radical education in our context? And what connections or questions could this reflection open?

Ecuador is an intercultural and plurinational country. This legislation has been established in its constitution since 2008, implying a reconfiguration of the national institutionalism from a legal framework which guarantees representative and participatory processes, recognizing the national diversity and the existence of ancestral communities protected by legitimate, collective and customary laws. This institutional integration responds to processes developed from the social and indigenous movements,

---

<sup>1</sup> Further information at <https://goo.gl/Jg4HHE> and <https://goo.gl/182Zho> ANOTHER ROADMAP SCHOOL FOR ARTS EDUCATION.

<sup>2</sup>consolidated around various historical mobilizations from the beginning of the Colonial and Republican periods, which currently play a fundamental role in the participation and resistance related to the State. <sup>3</sup>

Regarding education policies and its reforms, a relevant milestone is the international support that took place at the Declaration of Barbados in 1971 and 1977<sup>4</sup> about specific demands on land, culture and identity in South America (Velez V., 2002). These demands place the problem of education in a specific space in the disputes and social demands of social and indigenous movements in Latin America. The conditions that support ancestral communities, outside the private and public life of the State, cannot be transformed without education.

In this way, it is said that in the 70's, the demands and grassroots movements at local and international level linked to specific educational rights were strengthened and consolidated. But, what about previous processes of institutionalization? Is it necessary to outline them (even briefly) in order to get closer to the notion of radical education? Would it then imply expanding the spectrum of intercultural bilingual education as a local reference space? I raise these questions in order to understand the local process, and discuss carefully the tension when referring to radical education and, in our context, intercultural bilingual education. My purpose is to avoid a possible plain reading not only of the referents that I could find on what radical education is, but also of what nowadays implies to assume that disruptive education political processes are only introduced in a popular, bilingual, education practice. I give possible answers as to why it is necessary to integrate other categories in order to know and recognize what education is at the local level.

### **Education, rights and institutionalism – remarks**

---

<sup>2</sup> Organizations such as CONFENIAE (The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon), CONAIE (The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador), ECUARUNARI (The Confederation of Peoples of Quichua Nationality of Ecuador).

<sup>3</sup> Further information at <https://goo.gl/NZcsuU>

<sup>4</sup> For more information check: <http://www.laguarura.net/2012/11/04/a-proposito-de-la-lucha-indigena-declaracion-de-barbados-i-ii-yi-iii/>

I refer to the institutional changes recorded in the different Ecuadorian constitutions, twenty documents since 1830. Despite this broad framework, it is a historical reference of the debates on rights that have come to the front in a structural, political and social sense.<sup>5</sup>

In 1878, education was declared for the first time as a free and public right in Ecuador. In year 1929 education was constitutionally mentioned as an obligation of the State "to protect the indigenous people, in order to improve their social life, especially regarding their education and economic condition" (Republic of Ecuador, s /F). Subsequently in 1945, teaching in the Kichwa language or in the corresponding aboriginal language was included, as part of public education. This provision was in force for only one year until 1946. In 1967 the constitutional right to education with a racial/cultural view was again included; also, agricultural life was considered, that is the relationship of education with land, and peasantry as part of the education particularities that the State must protect. In 1978, it was the first time that "intercultural" was mentioned as part of the education rights; however, it was possible to denote a clear positioning of major and minor cultures, when mentioning that Spanish would be the language that would favor this intercultural relationship. In 1998, the greatest boom in the scope of education rights was seen, integrating the need for strategies for administrative, financial and pedagogical decentralization. For this purpose, the intercultural bilingual education system was created which implied that for the first time the participation of parents, the community, teachers and learners would be integrated as part of the creation and management of education processes; Spanish is maintained as a language of intercultural relationship, but in the intercultural bilingual education system the main language of the corresponding culture would be used. In 2008, the rights mentioned in

---

<sup>5</sup> All references have been taken from the official constitutional documents, more information at <http://www.cancilleria.gob.ec/constituciones-del-ecuador-desde-1830-asta-2008/>

the 1998 constitution were upheld, integrating non-formal education also as a right guaranteed by the State.<sup>6</sup>

After citing these references, I would like to share some thoughts that I feel are important to highlight. First, to acknowledge that education rights did not exist at the beginning of the republic, that is to say that from the start, these rights were not a part of the State's institutionality; on the other hand, to recognize that despite the 1998 reforms (an important paradigm of decentralization) the recognition process of diverse, and intercultural bilingual education has existed as a social struggle since the beginning of the twentieth century; lastly, to identify that in order to better understand these facts, we need a file revision that could determine the context of each process, and what allowed to build a legal framework with the particularities of each constitutional period.

**Back to the debate: radical education, implications to think about the local education processes.**

I admit it! I have drawn a very big picture (and maybe a little bit all over the place). But the main idea is to ensure that we can't talk about closed processes when discussing education issues. We need to understand the framework in which radical education and intercultural bilingual education have developed in Ecuador. There are implications that are broad, timeless and overlapping which have been constructed in conflict and tension. On the one hand, we acknowledge the discourses and processes that have consolidated despite the spread of the universal institutional position since the beginning of the twentieth century; on the other hand, there is a historical reflection brought back by social movements and countercultural agents that manage to integrate themselves into what we may understand or not as education, looked from various aspects of social history, culminating with a major milestone achieved with the constitution of 1998.

---

<sup>6</sup> I think that it is important to mention that in this constitutional period, this framework did not guarantee that these rights were respected. In fact, since 2012 due to the regulations of the Intercultural Education Law (LOEI by its acronym in Spanish) created in 2010, there has been a systematic attack to bilingual education, with a huge impact on farming and indigenous organizations.

## **A joint discussion- some ideas**

To inquire into the deep movements generated by radical education and intercultural bilingual education, in relation to what could/should be an education effort; I talked to some colleagues who are related to education processes in the field of radical, free, feminist and intercultural bilingual education<sup>7</sup>.

The conversations were broad and open. The idea was to talk about their own pedagogical and organizational processes instead of having prepared questions. These discussions did not reach an agreement, but that was never my intention in the first place. The purpose was to think from our jobs' perspectives and try to extract common and distant ideas, from what we could understand as the configuration of certain radical practices in our context, and how we could relate them (or not) to the historical process of critical and intercultural bilingual education. After having held the different conversations, and placing myself as a narrator of them, I have decided to define some points that group the main ideas and common questions.

A recurring thought was the need of pedagogical and radical practices such as actions and spaces committed to social and countercultural movements that look for answers to the systems of production and distribution of knowledge. A clear example of this is the "Amawta Rikchari" school and the fact that when it started it was backed by the Association of Indigenous People of Quito; we could also talk about the organization "Mujeres de Frente" that gives political support to the school of the same name; or the experience that Eliana had in feminist groups which made her opt for education.

Another reflection that came up from during the conversations was the importance of daily relationships in the world, in the common place. Pascale talks about work in women's schools, as a meeting place for them. This is assumed like a primary exercise of care – even over the education curriculum. Leandro mentions how the school Amawta Rikchari started with the meeting of different classmates that came from the

---

<sup>7</sup> Special thanks to Pascale Lasso from "Escuela Mujeres de Frente". (<https://escuelamujeresdefrente.wordpress.com/about/>) Professor at "Salesiana University" in the faculty of intercultural and bilingual education; to Leandro Yuquilema, head of the intercultural center "Amawta Rikchari" (former CEDEIBQ) <http://www.fundacionmuseosquito.gob.ec/mediacionComunitaria/assets/san-roque.pdf>; to Lennin Armando Santacruz, Professor in the faculty of Art at the "Universidad Central del Ecuador"; and to Eliana Pilar Guerrero, Professor and mother at the free school CDA <http://map.reevo.org/reports/view/344>

same rural community from which they migrated to the city of Quito in the 70's. Their ties since childhood and their conditions of migration, were the bridge for their meeting in the city. The school –says Eliana– is my option and commitment with the world, from motherhood to teaching as a way of transformation. Like this, intertwining the biography, the own word and the collective desire of construction processes are building education relationships.

Conversely, during the conversations it was difficult to understand the distinction between radical education, popular education and intercultural bilingual education. I feel that we're getting closer due to political affinity and a historical memory (in a very general way). Nevertheless, the moment of talking about specific details of the process, the reflections of you all pointed towards a transformation, that integrates more resources and languages in the moment of constructing the daily pedagogical relationships, the concrete material, the ancestral practices and the feminist groups. There is the feeling of trajectory (since the intercultural bilingual and popular education) that now is a place of permanent traffic and mobilization, from which questions are generated that question the processes, and from which different proposals are constructed. Even then, I accept that at this point I am walking a fine line, because the relationship between the different categories was not always so clear. This makes me think that categorizing comes from a language that does not always refer to the “doing” and practice of concrete experiences.

After these conversations, I feel that I can confirm that the radical educational practices are configured like pedagogies (in plural), and they are only possible in specific contexts. I mentioned above the pedagogical relationships that are built with participation and eventually they have become a right. This takes root in the fact that all radical practices are political and collective. Pascale shared her experience as a teacher of intercultural bilingual teachers. In this case, the education is in charge of the Community administration and it has always been ruled like an assembly by all the members of the community. In a similar way, Eliana explained that every morning the assembly takes place, little girls and boys of the CDA participate to talk, share responsibilities and spend time.

Finally, in the majority of the shared experiences, institutionalization is perceived as the generator of a negative impact on the organization because it takes away its autonomy. It locates the processes in a relationship of power between what is accepted and what is not, especially when they are not based on the collective or community commons.

Pas mentioned that from her perspective, once she was granted the right to intercultural education, the organizational process started to focus on demands that did not make the organization stronger but the assistentialism. On the other hand, Leandro shared that the absence of certain resources from the institution, makes the community participation, like “minga”, still part of the organization. This is a strong way of participation and of appropriation by the community, the space and the educational process.

### **To conclude**

The discussion introduced us to many perspectives, but it was not easy to adopt just one. As I began saying, I get the impression that this is a document of references for a cartography that is not drawn or explored yet, but it would be interesting to create one. I also feel that even though radical education was the excuse for this text, the most valuable was to identify the need of opening ourselves to other perspectives, something I would call radical educations (in plural). This way I think we will be able to generate a greater capacity of transformation in the actual crisis of education institutionality. Tension –institutionality and society– has been strongly fragmented and at the same time optimized by the government.