

## **Influence of international institutions on the development of Ecuador's education system during neoliberalism**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The article analyses the Ecuadorian system of basic education during the years of neoliberalism, and relates curricular discourses of this period with global trends determined by international institutions, particularly the World Bank. Through a rigorous analysis of institutional documents, documentary sources and semi-structured interviews with Ecuadorian educational system actors, the research evaluates to what extent public policies developed in the nineties, were determined by the agenda of international cooperation.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, educational policy, international institutions.

### **RESUMEN**

Este artículo analiza el sistema de educación básica ecuatoriano durante los años del neoliberalismo, y relaciona los discursos curriculares de este período con las tendencias globales determinadas por instituciones internacionales, especialmente el Banco Mundial (BM). A través de un riguroso análisis de documentos institucionales, fuentes documentales y entrevistas semi-estructuradas con actores del sistema educativo ecuatoriano, la investigación evalúa en qué medida, las políticas públicas desarrolladas en los años noventa, fueron determinadas por la agenda de la cooperación internacional.

Palabras clave: Neoliberalismo, política educativa, instituciones internacionales.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The second half of the twentieth century was definitely influenced by the development and planning of policies, which in those days gained importance in all Latin American countries. In education those policies gave rise to an accelerated expansion of the educational and literacy programs across the country. More in particular, during the 60's the population in universities and the number of teachers at all educational levels increased. Students, under the influence of the communist and socialist parties, engaged in political processes achieving the consolidation of the Ecuadorian Federation of Secondary students (FESE) and the Ecuadorian Federation of University students (FEUE). In the state's administration, technocrats, especially socialist ones, developed state projects in different social areas including education (Ayala Mora and Fernández, 1995). As a result, while in 1953 only 56,7% of the Ecuadorians had access to the primary school, in 1975 the percentage of the population that could access basic school climbed up to 93,7%. The first curricular reform of the new era was designed in 1964. It also included a plan that equated the duration of compulsory education (6 years)<sup>1</sup> in rural and urban schools.

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<sup>1</sup> Before the 1964 reform the compulsory rural education was only 4 years.

Through the early 70's, Ecuador had nine types of secondary schools: the traditional university preparatory schools in classic and modern humanities, business and commercial schools, fine arts schools, music schools, manual arts schools, and agricultural and animal husbandry schools. In those years schools had a large number of subjects and its schedule started not later than 8 am and teaching went on until 4 or 4.30 pm (Silva quoted in Oviedo, 2013). The educational reform of 1977 enacted a basic compulsory education of 9 years: 6 years of primary school and 3 years of basic high school. The seventies were also strongly influenced by educational strategies developed by *foreign experts and technocrats*. This influence was most manifest in areas such as educational innovation, curricular design and elaboration of learning materials, decreasing the role of teachers and national educational thinkers<sup>2</sup> (Ossenbach, 1999). After a decade under military governments, the democratic government (1979) proposed a *national pedagogic debate* to design educational policies for the new era. The result of the debate was the Educational Law of 1985. That law, without establishing substantial changes, gave priority to pre-schooling and tried to guarantee the nine years of basic education. In those years, education was divided in cycles: pre-primary (2 years), primary school (6 years) and secondary school (6 years), the latter was divided in two cycles of three years each (the basic and the diversified cycle).

Paradoxically, during the eighties there was a systematic decrease of resources for education. While in 1980 the budget destined for education still represented 33% of the state's general budget, it went down to 17% in 1990 (Ossenbach, 1999). At that time about 20% of the basic education was privately operated (Silva quoted in Oviedo, 2013). The eighties were also characterized by the consolidation of social development and cultural rights recognition fostered by the social movements of the Ecuadorian indigenous nationalities. They achieved in 1988 the official recognition of intercultural bilingual education as a system organized for and by themselves<sup>3</sup> (Oviedo and Wildemeersch, 2008).

During the nineties basic education policy was inspired by the international programs subscribed by the Ecuadorian governments, such as the *World Declaration of Education for All* at Jomtien in Thailand in 1990. Education was also influenced by policies developed by international organizations such as the World Bank, which supported big public educational projects with foreign loans. The agreements signed by Latin American countries at those conferences, initiated the development of curricular reforms in the region, all of them characterized by common features. The decade started and finished with international agreements. In 2000 Ecuador participated in the *Education for All in the Americas* summit that took place in the Dominican Republic, as well as in the *Education for All-Educational Forum* at Dakar in Senegal. In spite of the good intentions and nice declarations in those meetings, the goals and the agreements proposed are far from being achieved (Torres, 2000).

Against the context of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more in particular the period of neoliberalism (1970-2000), the study aimed analyzing the *educational model*<sup>4</sup> developed by neoliberalism and globalization and its influence in Latin America, particularly in Ecuador. More specific, the paper evaluates to what extent the curricular discourse and public policies developed in Ecuador during the neoliberal years respond to global tendencies, determined by international institutions, especially the World Bank. The research was guided by the following hypotheses: (i) the Ecuadorian curricular discourse and educational public policies during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century changed their orientation under the influence of external actors; and (ii) the state gave the leading role in the design and even development of the national curricular discourse and policies to international experts.

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<sup>2</sup> Probably this is the origin of foreign intervention on terms of curricular policies and curricular reformation. Later on, the foreign agencies will determine and influence educational processes in the globalization framework.

<sup>3</sup> This paper does not address the intercultural bilingual education. This aspect is treated in: Oviedo, A., D. Wildemeersch, 2008. Intercultural education and curricular diversification: The case of the Ecuadorian Intercultural Bilingual Education Model (MOSEIB). *COMPARE*, 38(4), 455-470.

<sup>4</sup> An educational model can be defined as "a correlated set of data, events, facts, forces, situations, institutions and mentality; tending to use, promote and manage knowledge, information, myths, values, skills, behavior and patterns of education, in terms of both, individual and collective learning, at specific historical and social situations" (Fernaca quoted in Cardoso Vargas, 2007).

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research techniques used were the analysis of institutional documents and documentary sources, and semi-structured interviews. As part of a broader research, that included the analysis of the Intercultural Bilingual Education in Ecuador, 37 interviews and 2 questionnaires were conducted with authorities of the Ministry of Education, indigenous leaders, directors of Intercultural Education, teachers, parents, students and renowned professionals in the educational field. For the nature of this paper, just 5 interviews and 1 questionnaire are quoted. Those were carried out with: (a) informants directly involved in the technical reorganization of the Ecuadorian curricula, such as authorities and consultants of the Ministry of Education: Dr. Susana Araujo, former director of the EB-PRODEC project for basic education and director of the Curricular Reform Project (1995-1996), Dr. Mónica Burbano de Lara, former consultant of the Curricular Reform Project and leader of the national team that elaborated the curriculum, and Architect Samia Peñaherrera, former director of the PROMECEB basic education project; (b) leaders of NGO and Teachers Union: Dr. Juan Samaniego, official of education UNICEF Ecuador during the Curricular Reform Project and Dr. Aracelly Moreno, former president of the Ecuadorian Teachers Union (*Unión Nacional de Educadores-UNE*); and (c) educational researchers such as Dr. Rosa María Torres, in 2003 also Minister of Education. The semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were conducted in the period March-May 2007 and April 2008. The literature review encompassed among research papers the analysis of institutional archives belonging to the Ministry of Education, CONAIE (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador), and ECUARUNARI (Confederación de Pueblos de la Nacionalidad Kichwa del Ecuador). The information was processed by the qualitative data-analysis software NVivo 8, specifically designed for qualitative researches dealing with the analysis of small volumes of very rich text-based and/or multimedia information.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. *Brief examination of neoliberalism and its consequences in Ecuador*

The nature export economy, transformed Ecuador into a producer-country, betting repeatedly on different commodities, such as: cocoa-country, banana-country, flower-country, shrimp-country, oil-country, focusing recently on the exportation of mine products. Thanks to the oil, Ecuador entered the international market and became attractive to international financial organizations. *Oil-Ecuador* got the credits that the *Banana- or Cocoa-Ecuador* had never received. However, oil triggered the country's external debt. Debt was strongly enhanced by the investment of significant resources from the financial international markets which could not find a profitable placement in the industrialized countries because of the recession. Another factor that contributed to the country's massive debt was the fall in oil prices. As a consequence of those elements the external debt grew almost 22 times from 1971 to 1981. According to Acosta (2009) while in 1971 15 out of 100 dollars was exported, ten years later 71 out of 100 dollars was committed to export.

Against the background of indebtedness, the implementation of the neoliberal recipe through the Washington Consensus was a formality. The geopolitical control of Ecuador was in place and the basic principles enunciated a Decalogue constituted of: austerity and fiscal discipline; restructuring of public spending; tax reform; privatization of public enterprises; establishment of a competitive exchange rate management; trade liberalization; deregulation of financial markets and opening of the capital account; open without restrictions to foreign direct investment; relaxation of economic and labor relations; and warranty and fulfillment of private property rights. Neoliberalism was installed as the dominant paradigm at a surprising rate. The ode by economic growth became rector, while social policies -within these educational- were subsumed; and dependent from growth. In addition to the implementation of the Washington Consensus, Ecuador deepened on major reforms that constituted a serious legal and institutional regression.

Torres (2002) considers the neoliberal state as a new type of state that emerged in the region from the eighties of the twentieth century, primarily promoted by neo conservative governments. In Latin America the first neoliberal economic experiment was carried out in Chile under the dictatorship of general Pinochet. During the late nineties the market models implemented in Argentina and Mexico represented particular neoliberal approaches. Neoliberalism has its origins in classical liberal economic theories, but it also differs from those theories, mainly with regards to the role of the state and the individual. The main neoliberal thesis promotes a minimal state, free trade with open markets and the reduction of the public sector. According to the neoliberal thought, the state's role is restricted to the creation of the conditions enabling market operations. Neoliberalism is linked to structural measures, a set of programs, policies, conditions and recommendations suggested by international organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF (Apple, 2001; Torres, 2002; Oviedo, 2007).

Especially in the developing countries neoliberal policies and measures were implemented under the command letters of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), clarifying its implicit economic adjustment focus<sup>5</sup>. The measures also included the devaluation of currencies to promote exports, the tariff reduction on imports and the increase of public and private savings (Torres, 2002). The market logic and the ascent of its economic values implied that supranational financial organizations, which could not be controlled by the states, enlarged their impact on the development policies of the countries that were financially dependent on external loans. All these elements contributed to the furthering of an unfair balance between rich and poor countries.

This neoliberal agenda was to a certain extent also reflected in the concepts of how education was supposed to play a role with regard to development. Schooling was increasingly framed as a contribution to the fostering of human capital and of the entrepreneurial spirit (Laval, 2005). In this way, the goal of educational policies became embedded in the requirements of the global economy. It tried to respond to the demand for workers capable of flexible learning, working in teams, operating in creative ways, and preferably working for cheap salaries. Additionally, a vision of a permanent renovation of professional skills was introduced. Workers were supposed to be able to flexibly change their jobs according to the dynamics of technological and entrepreneurial innovations (Laval, 2005). In fact, education was increasingly considered as a market or quasi market and the sector was invited to function according to the rules of supply and demand. Although this *entrepreneurial vision* started its development already during the 70's, it was only by the end of 80's and 90's that neoliberal principles decisively affected education. According to the professionals in the educational field, some manifestations of this vision are: the transformation of the school space into a market space<sup>6</sup> and the conversion of the educational encounter into a market transaction: a product to be sold to the families-as-consumers. In general, international agencies such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCDE), the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO) were important sources of inspiration for this kind of educational policies (Laval, 2005).

In Ecuador, just like in other Latin American countries, the new educational paradigm, understood as a new vision on education to be followed, came via macroeconomic IMF adjustment policies and World Bank recommendations. Those measures were followed by the Christian-Democratic government (1980-1984), and later by coalitions of Christian and Social Democrats<sup>7</sup>. These policies led to a drastic decrease of the social investment budget, affecting directly education. If in 1981 5,4% of the GNP was destined for education, it persistently decreased and reached dramatic

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<sup>5</sup> Structural adjustment is defined as a set of programs, policies and conditionality's that are recommended by the Word Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other financial organizations (Torres, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> A concrete manifestation is the commercialization of the school space (the presence of bars, beverages, food, the sponsoring of scholar activity by enterprises and multinationals, and the publicity masked under the form of pedagogical products.

<sup>7</sup> During the period 1988-1992, although a Social Democratic government was in place, the economic model application continued. The 1992-1996 Republican Conservative government tried to consolidate the neoliberal model, implementing strong measures to reduce state intervention and privatization of its companies. This continued until the arrival of the Demo-Christian government elected for the period 1998-2002, and overthrown in the 2000. This government was said to be responsible of the worst economic crisis of the country.

low levels, of the order of 1,8% in 2000 (Luna Tamayo, 2006). From 2000 onwards, the average investment in education, in relation to the GNP was only 2,5%, an expenditure very inferior to other countries of the region such as Bolivia (6,7%), Venezuela (5,1%), or Cuba (12%) (Rovayo, 2006). On the other hand, important resources went to the payment of foreign debt. For instance, while in 2001 31% of the total income of the state was destined to the payment of foreign debts, only 1,6% of the GNP was destined for education (Salgado, 2002; Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2007).

During the 90's, the Republican Conservative Government (1992-1996) played a major role in implanting the neoliberal model and its new educational paradigm. That government started the *state's modernization*, which included a voluntary resigning of public employees. In this process, the best professionals were expelled from the public administration. The existing structures of the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) were dismantled, even though traditionally its employees got the lowest salaries of the entire public sector (Luna Tamayo, 2006). The Republican Government also started a curricular reform that imitated the South-Korean, Singapore and Hong Kong development models (Oviedo, 2007). Paradoxically, South-Korea, in those years destined 3,8% of its GNP to education. This was the beginning of an increase in investment that reached more than 10% in 2008. In contrast, Ecuador continued to invest only an average of 2,5% of the GNP. During these years, the two most important educational development projects were consolidated; they were the first versions of an educational decentralization policy, supported by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB).

The years after, the Republican Conservative Government was characterized by economic and political crises. However, the enforcement of decentralization did not stop. Inspired by Argentinean and Chilean experiences, another Democratic-Christian Government tried in 2001 to organize a process of municipal decentralization. This project was planned as a pilot-project coordinated by the municipality of Guayaquil. It encountered a strong opposition from the teacher's union (*Unión Nacional de Educadores*) (UNE). According to Dr. Aracelly Moreno<sup>8</sup> municipal decentralization was a strategy to enforce IMF's and World Bank's commands in educational policy. Initiatives of decentralization also meant a reduction of UNE's power and influence<sup>9</sup> (Luna Tamayo, 2006). The economic and political crises caused the accelerated increase of private education initiatives during the mid 90's to the mid 2000. From 1994 to 2003, the private sector had increased its enrolment rates in pre-schooling from 40 to 57%, in primary schools from 19 to 24%, while in high school from 27 to 28% (Luna Tamayo, 2006). When in 1976, 17,5% of the total of 10.963 educational centers was private and 76,6% public, in 2006, 32% of the total of 31.155 educational centers was private, while 60% was public<sup>10</sup> (Araujo Sánchez, 2008).

### 3.2. *The World Bank: the sponsor of educational projects and reforms in Latin America*

The *Education for All* (EFA) model was presented by the World Bank, the central architect of this initiative (Torres, 2002), during the Jomtien summit in Thailand in 1999, with the support of UNESCO, UNICEF and UNDP. The World Bank's dominant position herein is the result of the crisis that affected UNESCO from the eighties onwards. UNESCO's crisis was mainly financial because of withdrawals of sponsorship of the USA and the UK, with direct consequence a reduction of UNESCO'S role in educational policies. Since then, the World Bank increasingly included education into its policy areas, aiming to create the grounds for the long-term re-payment of the debt through a structural adjustment (Bonal, 2004). The World-Bank needed the collaboration of UNESCO in order to improve its image in the soft sectors of society, whereas UNESCO needed the collaboration of the World-Bank in order to remain financially in balance (Reyskens, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Aracelly Moreno is the former president of the Ecuadorian teacher's union (*Unión Nacional de Educadores, UNE*); personal communication in 2008.

<sup>9</sup> The actions developed by UNE those days also represented an increase in the teacher's basic salary: from \$45 dollars to \$100 dollars per month.

<sup>10</sup> The remaining percentage in both years, respectively 5,9% in 1976 and 8% in 2006, correspond to the *escuelas fiscomisionales*, catholic educational institutions receiving important economic support from the government.

World Bank's recommendations in different areas are mostly more than mere recommendations. The Bank is pro-active. It initiates the contact with the countries to design the specific loan and recommends the policy and its conditions, which generally are commands strongly related to the privatization and reduction of public spending (Torres, 2002). For instance, during the late eighties, the Latin American and the Caribbean governments enthusiastically adopted the *financiamiento compartido* (shared financing). This policy implied that poor families were obliged to pay voluntary fees and other costs to support their educational system, because the state retreated from its responsibilities with regard to schooling, due to the reduction of public resources for education (Torres, 2007). But of course, being a bank, its main interests are loans and other bank's businesses. As Torres (2002) notes, in the context of international capitalism, the World Bank plays the role of a regulatory agency. He furthermore point out that the World Bank is a lending agency, not an agency that offers donations. This distinction is useful to explain World Bank's behavior. And as correctly stated by Torres (2002) development in this context is mainly connected to commercial activities.

The World Bank can be identified as one of the most important actors in the globalization process of education. The Bank and other financial institutions used the conditioned loans to remove the impediments of the state (Inclán Espinosa, 2006). As such, decentralization, deregulation, participation and targeting but also, rigorous supervision and universalization of basic facilities are the guidelines and core recommendations issued by the IADB and the World Bank; recommendations which must be followed by the requesting country (Ricci, 2003; Bonal, 2004; Inclán Espinosa, 2006). The World Bank and to a lesser extent the IADB are the main providers of economic resources for curricular reform and/or educational development projects. Those resources are destined mainly to improve education in Latin America, similar as the introduction of the model to all regions of the world.

In this sense, the educational policies and strategies applied in the Latin American countries during the 90's presented various similarities. The version of reform that prevailed throughout the decade of the 90's in this region, as well as in other regions of the South, is the one developed via international financing and consultant's offices, particularly those of the World Bank. The main recipients are decentralization, school autonomy, participation, the co-management of the community and social consultation (Torres, 2002). The decision of the policies carried out in the countries have been promoted and financed by the international agencies, which link public policy and government. It is relevant to note that the state policies, with high probability of permanence outlasting government changes and changes in ministers, are those financed by international institutions (Torres, 2007).

### **3.3. Design and implementation of Latin American reforms**

The design and implementation of Latin American reforms followed general trends. The reforms that originated in the 90's can be seen primarily in relation to the reform undertaken in the USA in the 1980's, as well as the beginnings of the *reform fashion* in the neoliberal age. This fashion was spread all over the world as part of the necessary adaptation of the educational discourse to the demands of the emerging economic model. These reforms were strongly influenced by the Spanish cognitive reform at the end of the 80's. The curricular re-organization, the preoccupations with constructivism and individualization of education were characteristic features of this process (Oviedo, 2007).

The reform reports of the 80's share a strong nationalism, an unwavering millennial vision, a continuing assumption about possessive individualism, and a belief in the efficiency of the market (Popkewitz quoted in Pinar *et al.*, 1995). Many of the principles of the USA reform are shared by the Latin American reforms, in terms of individualization of education as well as in terms of managerial discourse. The national orientation of education, supported by state development and welfare state ideas was displaced. A new view of education that must work according to the market principles started, including elements from the free supply and demand, supported by a liberal state (Inclán Espinosa, 2006). In line with the neoliberal conceptions of these days, many of the reform processes were based on the principles of consensus among the stakeholders operating in the civil society. However, their original design was developed without the participation of teachers. Only specialists were included.

The role played by the Latin American states also reveals a common trend. The state in this new role created the legal framework to guarantee the autonomy of schools (Dussel, 2006). After the

revision and/or reformulation of the laws of education, and according to the societal tendencies of the region during the 90's, the next general step taken by the states was the implementation of educational development projects, which in many cases proved to be unsustainable after their completion, particular when the international financial support dried up. Therefore, as part of this consensus, the new reforms focused mainly on the teacher's empowerment, which was difficult, not only because of the minimal role the teachers played in the reform design, but also because the teachers did not easily understand the variety of the reform documents. Teachers were supposed to have achieved a high level of understanding of complex bureaucratic matters. Yet, this high level was often lacking in reality (Dussel, 2006). Empowerment was difficult due to the opposition of teacher unions to the World Bank-IADB educational projects, the decentralized managerial organization and the reform processes themselves (Torres, 2000). These strategies were considered by the unions as part of the privatization project of public education, implied in the whole new educational wave.

An official evaluation of the educational situation in the region and the reform role took place at the end of the 90's. From this study three hypotheses appeared. First, the reform processes were not yet consolidated, which implied a task to be accomplished. Second, more time was needed to deepen the reforms in course. Third, the policies chosen were not the most appropriate (Gajardo, 1999). It seems that nowadays the most applicable hypothesis is the third one. Reforms are not easily evaluated in the short-term, because their effects can only be seen in the mid-term (Inclán Espinosa, 2006). However, in accordance with the practices developed in Latin America, it is possible to contrast the actual processes with the way educators perceived the reform processes.

### 3.4. *The World Bank and IADB in Ecuadorian education*

Decentralization, school management and community participation in education started with *executive units*, created with international loans, independent from the MEC. During the 90's, two executive units were created to manage two big educational projects of Ecuadorian basic education: *Proyecto de Mejoramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Básica (PROMECEB-Redes Amigas)* and *Proyecto de Desarrollo, Eficiencia y Calidad para el Mejoramiento de la Educación Básica (EB/PRODEC)*. Both projects used medium-size administrative units called *Centros Educativos Matrices (CEMs)*. Every *CEM* was an educational centre that supervised 15 to 30 schools located geographically close. Previous experiences of decentralization in Latin America were designed with the aim of improving the school enrolment. Decentralization in Ecuador was a novel experience with the main objective of improving the school's output (Ponce, 2006). Therefore those initiatives initiated the concept of *educational quality* in the country, associated to decentralization of school management and community participation.

The *PROMECEB-Redes Amigas* project, designed for rural schools, started to operate in 1990 with the financial help of IADB. Two phases of the project can be distinguished: the *PROMECEB* project (1990-1999) and *Redes Amigas* (1990-2005). The first seven years of *PROMECEB*, focused mainly on infrastructure. According to Samia Peñaherrera Solah<sup>11</sup>, the last manager of *PROMECEB* and the first manager of *Redes Amigas*, *PROMECEB* at the start was a corpse. There were two options, she said: either to fill out the technical forms to close the project and return the remaining amount of the loan (26 million dollars), or to re-design and reorient the project. She chose the second option and invested the 26 million dollars already given to the country. The total budget of the program in the second phase (*Redes Amigas*) was 50 million dollars: 45 million coming from the IADB and 5 million from the Ecuadorian government. Only in 2005, the Ministry of Education and Culture created an administrative unit to coordinate the school networks (*Redes Amigas*) (Ponce, 2006).

*EB-PRODEC* had similar characteristics, but it was designed for marginalized urban areas. The project obtained a loan from the World Bank of 89 million dollars. It financed mainly (a) textbooks and other education materials, in-service teacher training, pre-school and special education programs and the enhancement of existing physical facilities; (b) a decentralized network for school management that delivers these services; (c) the development of an educational assessment system;

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<sup>11</sup> Former director of the *PROMECEB* project; interviewed in 2007.

and (d) a policy and institutional strengthening of the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) (World Bank, 2008).

Both projects encountered a strong opposition from the teachers union (UNE), especially because of the budget transfer from the Provincial Directions to the networks (Ponce, 2006). Some educators, such as Torres (2004) criticized the role of the projects on weakening the already unstable structure of MEC. Those projects developed a so-called *golden bureaucracy* which contrasted with the poor MEC salaries<sup>12</sup>. Torres (2004) is also very critical about the results. According to her, *EB-PRODEC* finished because its *CEMs* did not operate very well. She stated that *EB-PRODEC* is considered an unsatisfactory project even by the World Bank.

All the projects of those years increased the national foreign debt with 160.000 million dollars. They created infrastructure and developed training without continuity. This was combined with administrative instability and a minimal impact in terms of quality and results (Luna Tamayo, 2006). On the level of the Latin American continent, the financing of those projects also meant a significant increase in the foreign debt of the requesting countries. During the period of 1988 to 2006, 607 projects and operations in the educational area were initiated on a world-wide scale; 111 of them were situated in Latin American countries (with exclusion of the Caribbean region). In 2006, 29 projects were still active. Their main topics of interest today are: decentralization, innovation, equity and efficiency, reform, and modernization (Inclán Espinosa, 2006). Due to the World Bank recommendations on cost-sharing and self-management, public education is non-gratuitous and therefore it is not public. The way the concept of community participation has been applied excluded communities from curricular and pedagogic issues, as well as from information and comprehension of local communities, families and national society. Effective decentralization supposes a strong MEC. However, the MEC's were eroded by the executive units (Torres, 2004).

### 3.5. *Reforms, innovation and change*

The concepts of reform stands for the initiatives carried out by governments, having a national or regional character, are top-down and imply a technocratic conception of knowledge. Those initiatives are focused mainly on modifying the administrative, curricular and pedagogic aspects of the school system (Torres, 2007). Innovation can be defined as a set of interventions, decisions and processes with a certain level of intention and systematization, which try to modify attitudes, ideas, cultures, contents, models and educational practices (Ricci, 2003). They are modifications promoted in the local context, such as the classroom itself (Torres, 2007). In this context, reform functions as a slogan system in which the innovations actually legitimate the ongoing patterns of educational conduct (Popkewitz, 1983).

The differentiation of those concepts such as reform and innovation is important, because they are susceptible to confusion leading easily to misunderstandings in the implementation of reform projects. In line with its problematic utilization, this differentiation gives clues to understand the reform processes developed in the region. The character and the impact of reforms in Latin America are directly linked to those definitions. This is the case, first of all, because it is not possible to develop a substantial educational change by considering just top-down or just bottom-up approaches. Substantial change processes are only possible in a framework of a wide articulation of both of them, with the engagement of all the sectors involved in the educational activity (Torres, 2007).

After analyzing the reform processes implemented in Latin America, many authors agree that the originally planned educational change processes, did neither reach the final goal nor did they achieve the development of qualitative changes in students' learning (Torres, 2007<sup>13</sup>; Samaniego<sup>14</sup> and

<sup>12</sup> At that time, a *Redes Amigas* consultant who lived in Honduras earned 9100 dollars per month, the Minister of Education 3100 dollars per month, and a MEC National Director 250 dollar per month.

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Rosa María Torres, educational researcher, she conducted diverse researches in education in Latin America, was Minister of Education in Ecuador in 2003; subjected to a questionnaire in 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Juan Samaniego, official of Education of UNICEF Ecuador, during the curricular reform process. His organization participated during the different phases of the curricular reform and supported local initiatives mainly in the country side area. Nowadays he is an educational consultant and university teacher.



Burbano de Lara<sup>15</sup>, both interviewed in 2007). The level of innovation depends on the interpretation given by teachers to the reform document. This interpretation often relates more to the methodological aspects, yet at the same time it contrasts with the daily practices of school as institution. Daily life in school is marked by tensions, which often are the result of the authoritarian character of the school management. Consequently the playful dimension that an innovation can have -it always is somehow irreverent- enters in tension with discipline, which is a pattern linked to the norm. Therefore, to a certain extent, innovation contradicts discipline, hierarchy and norm, all of them underlying principles of the school (Samaniego, interviewed in 2007).

Some others argue that the methods used to implement the reform processes were wrong. Studying the Brazilian case, Ricci (2003) underlines that the reform implementation in that country was accelerated to such an extent that it could not reflect educational practices inside the schools, or could not be completed, as was the case in Ecuador (Araujo<sup>16</sup>, interviewed in 2007).

Thus, the conclusions put forward by Popkewitz (1983) about reform are perfectly applicable to these experiences: “The management scheme became an end in itself; introducing a division between conception and execution of the work. Teacher and students were involved in the execution of the procedures defined in the systems, but they were not involved in the creative acts that relate specific activities to some visions of the whole. Therefore, the expressed academic purposes were secondary to the use of the management schemes. Meaning that in the process of change, the ends had been replaced by the means.”

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The second half of the twentieth century was characterized by development and planning policies, which brought an accelerated expansion of educational programs, reflected in an important increase of basic school enrolment rates. In the 70's, education followed models and strategies developed by foreign experts and technocrats, which meant a decrease in the role of the teachers. During the 80's, there were a systematic decrease of resources for education. The overall education budget was reduced with almost 50%. However, in that decade, processes of social development and civil rights recognition were achieved by Ecuadorian indigenous nationalities, among which the most important was the official recognition of their Intercultural Bilingual Education System.

Global educational strategies were designed in the 90's. They were implemented in the region through Latin American reforms that shared a constructivist pedagogical orientation and incorporated a managerial language. This global reorientation was necessary to develop an educational discourse in accordance with globalization demands. It aimed at providing a pedagogical framework that should help the separate countries to respond to the constant movement of capital and people (labor) in the context of the global free market economy. This was a serious attempt to subordinate education to the economic neo-liberal discourse that in those days was almost omnipresent.

In Ecuador, as well as in other Latin American countries, the new educational paradigm came via IMF adjustment policies and World Bank recommendations, including the reduction of the state apparatus. These policies involved a drastic decrease of the central state's educational investment, while important resources went to foreign debt payment. During those years, some important attempts to decentralize education were undertaken. The World Bank and IADB financed the creation of *executive units*, which were in fact parallel ministries designed to execute those projects, re-directing education under the principles of decentralization, educational management and civil society participation. The rich projects that supported the reform implementation could not be sustained by the

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<sup>15</sup> Dr. Mónica Burbano de Lara, former consultant of the Curricular Reform Project and leader of the national team that elaborated the curriculum.

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Susana Araujo, former director of the EB-PRODEC project, former director of the Curricular Reform Project (1994-1996), among other public educational responsibilities.

states after the IADB or the World Bank funding stopped. Therefore the original ambition to meet the basic needs was left behind. Another decentralization initiative was the *municipalisation of education*, the aim of which was to decentralize education. Both decentralization initiatives encountered a firm opposition of the teachers' union. Their strikes left schools unattended. All these factors influenced the crisis of public education and the increase of private education.

The most important educational event of the 90's was the *Consensual Curricular Reform*. The World Bank and other international financial organizations played an important role in the development of such reforms. The World Bank expanded its influence in the countries' educational systems generating similar changes at a regional and even a global scale. Latin American educational reform processes tried to establish a closer link between new professional demands and educational projects, especially those guided by the World Bank proposals. High priority was given to those operations oriented to the preparation for the market and those in charge of the development of new technologies (Ricci, 2003).

Curricular discourses in Ecuador were local adaptations of international educational processes. An official evaluation of the reform processes in the region was conducted in 1999, almost 20 years after their starting point. It concludes that the outcomes of the reforms show a complete policy inadequacy to achieve equity, quality and participation; an urgent need to consolidate the reforms, and finally the necessity to implement additional policies in the social, economic, political and institutional contexts (Gajardo, 1999). The necessary link between reform and schools was not achieved. Neither did the reforms improve aspects of the teaching loads and teaching hours (Dussel, 2006). These observations again make clear that curriculum is not a norm, nor an edict, but a classroom practice developed by teachers. They also again remind us that "not every policy should be expressed as a reform" (Popkewitz quoted in Dussel, 2006). The educational policies established are not processes that directly affect the real activity developed on the shop floor of the classrooms. Those policies do not provoke sustained reforms, but they remain stuck in the discourse and documents (Popkewitz, 1983). Often reforms do not change the school practices; on the contrary they reorient the reform edicts and the objectives of equity, quality and participation are seldom achieved.

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