

Engaging and Transforming the Discourse of Neoliberalism in Education

A Possibility for International Solidarity

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Introduction

IN THE SUMMER OF 2002, I traveled to Bolivia for the first time. I was one of the three members charged with the task of exploring a possible collaboration between Saint Joseph's University, the university where I teach, and Fe y Alegría [faith and joy] Bolivia (henceforth FyA), a Bolivian subsidiary of an international program that provides formal and informal education in Bolivia to approximately 250,000 students. The evident basis for this collaboration was the shared Jesuit identity of both institutions and their common vision of education as a crucial element of their mission and as a tool for social justice. This common understanding resulted in an informal, yet very strong, ongoing partnership that continues expanding and involving more members of both organizations.¹

Crucial to the development of this partnership and to my own growing commitment to it was the two-week intensive course entitled *Institutional and Curriculum Planning* that I co-taught with two colleagues in the summer of 2003 in the city of Cochabamba. FyA explicitly requested that our university offer this professional development course as part of the organization's permanent search to integrate their Jesuit mission with the demands of the national curriculum reform implemented in the mid-1990s. Those reforms had affected all the educational institutions of the country. For FyA, this course was an important component of professional development in an area vital to secure consistency between educational and institutional projects. For me, this course was also the opportunity to define my own position in a concrete educational context informed by the encounter of Western with non-Western traditions and the inherent inequalities between them. In the specific terms of a curriculum theorist, this course was an opportunity to pursue the question: how can we use the curriculum theory developed mostly in the U.S. context to advance the liberatory promises of education in impoverished realities outside the Western tradition?

This article addresses my personal involvement in this course. Specifically, it focuses on my own role as the graduate and professional educator in the area of curriculum planning and my own reflections on the process of designing and implementing this area from a postcritical perspective, mainly poststructuralist. Based upon my experience in Bolivia and reflections emerging from that encounter with Bolivian school administrators, I make the argument that looking at curriculum design from a poststructuralist perspective, in the terms that I will explain later in the article, will help educators in Bolivia to better understand the ideological implications of curriculum design and, therefore, to develop a curriculum design that is more conscious of the dangers of the technocratic model pervasive in neoliberal societies. I further argue that this theoretical perspective can help educators in Western countries to create collaborative models with non-Western countries based on solidarity rather than on a traditional, colonial model, in which countries like Bolivia play the role of the passive “receiver” of our knowledge.

Fe y Alegría and the Context of the Current Bolivian Education Reform

Fe y Alegría is a Jesuit institution that gives formal and informal education to the poorest sectors of society in Latin America. It was founded in 1955 in Venezuela, and it is now present in almost every single country in Latin America, Bolivia being the country with the largest organization. Because of its Jesuit origin, FyA is the recipient of a faith legacy in Latin America framed within the expansion of the colonial powers that tried to make good Christians out of the indigenous people of the Americas. However, because of its Jesuit identity, FyA was born with the institutional commitment to the pursuit of social justice predicated upon the Theology of Liberation² (Lampe, 1999; Torrens, 1995).

This allegiance to those marginalized groups in society for whom education is usually out of reach has challenged the organization to create a network of schools to respond to the needs of communities suffering extensive poverty. Of particular interest among the latter are the *Yachai Wasis* (“houses of learning,” in quechua, a local language), a program that provides living accommodation during the week for students who otherwise could not be attending schools because of the long distance they would have to walk every day. These programs are located in close proximity to FyA schools and are run by educators that help students with their academic work. Basic to their philosophy and *modus operandi* is a deep respect for the cultural traditions that students bring to the schooling experience from their home communities. As such, during the time students remain in this program, educators engage in community organization very similar to the cultures with which the students are most familiar. In so doing, both the students and the teachers contribute to the betterment of the group by taking up the daily chores and responsibilities that benefit the whole group’s communal life together (i.e., housekeeping chores, taking care of animals and plants, etc.).

An essential feature of FyA programs is their integration in larger communities’ strategic plans. This is particularly the case in rural areas where FyA works closely with other community institutions and local governments to improve the future of the people in the region. In this case, programs such as the *Yachai Wasis* become a part of a larger plan to fulfill the needs of the community. In many areas, for example, the *Yachai Wasis* are involved in health programs that try to improve the diet of the population. Thus, these programs teach students to grow new vegetables. There is a vegetable garden in each *Yachai Wasi* that students tend for the purpose of integrating new foods which become a part of the family diet when these students bring this knowledge to their communities. In the same way, FyA students are educated and expected to be

leaders in their communities in those areas that are deemed desirable according to local and regional plans.

Organizationally, FyA is a private institution. The teachers in this program, however, are paid by the Bolivian Ministry of Education. This arrangement responds to a general agreement between the two institutions according to which FyA abides by the educational regulations provided by the state while the state provides for school personnel. Within this agreement, FyA committed to school changes, rules, and regulations prescribed by the Ministry of Education, while the latter agreed to give enough autonomy to the program to make decisions on how to carry out those required changes. The case of bilingual education in the Education Reform of 1994 is a good example of this relationship. The core of this reform was the principle of interculturalism and the recognition that, for the first time in the history of Bolivia, education should acknowledge the rich cultural legacy of the almost 60% of indigenous population including more than two dozen of the indigenous languages that are spoken in the country (Morales, 2004). In this reform, Spanish lost its monopoly as the only language of instruction, and bilingualism became one of the main pillars of the new educational changes (Aikman, 2000). FyA implemented this regulation even before it came into law by developing a bilingual program of its own (Programa Intercultural Bilingüe-PIB) based on individualized instruction and relying on the teachers' expertise to scaffold the learning of the new language. The private character of the organization also allowed FyA to include an additional component to the curriculum related to its Jesuit identity, which it named "Fe y Vida" [faith and life].

Another attractive element of the organization is its emphasis on professional development. Supported mostly by private grant moneys, FyA consistently offers professional development courses that improve teachers' preparation and that place them in a more competitive position in relation to teachers in the public education system. This emphasis on professional development, particularly in the context of education reform, is what made FyA enthusiastic about collaborating with Saint Joseph's University. Bolivia has a small number of institutions of higher education and, consequently, also a small number of professionals in education with doctoral degrees who could establish partnerships between FyA schools and teacher education programs at the universities.

Although Saint Joseph's University was far in distance from Bolivia, the common Jesuit identity of the two organizations made this collaboration both possible and desirable. It was in this context that the course on *Institutional and Curriculum Planning* took place. Participants in this course were not teachers but "técnicos," the Spanish term for those educators working outside the schools and helping schools in the design and implementation of both curriculum and institutional changes. Teaching this course to this group of professionals was consistent with the FyA model of professional development according to which these técnicos are considered "educators of educators" and are expected to help other educators to develop the programs, concepts, and practices addressed by the course. There were 30 técnicos participating in the course from every "departamento" (region) in the country. All of them held college degrees, although most of them did not have formal academic knowledge of curriculum.

Conceptualizing the Course

A few years before I decided to co-teach the course on *Institutional and Curriculum Planning* in Bolivia, I had participated in a comprehensive education reform in Spain. This experience had raised several important questions that I later pursued in my own research agenda. Two of these questions became particularly important to me when conceptualizing this

course. First, what types of alternative curriculum designs are available to us when rejecting linearity and technocracy? My own experience had warned me of the dangers of holding democratic expectations for the curriculum, as we did in Spain in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the curriculum itself was designed in the technocratic tradition that asks teachers to implement the knowledge developed by educational “experts.”

As some critics of the Spanish curriculum reform have pointed out, this model drew attention to the new technicalities of, in this case, a curriculum based on the expertise of psychology while avoiding deeper scrutiny on the social implications of this model (Plataforma Asturiana de Acción Crítica, 1998; Varela, 1991). Indeed, this experience and my research in this area have made it evident to me that curriculum is a complex field of study, which escapes simple, seductive equations that categorically divide experts-designers from practitioners-implementers (Beyer & Apple, 1998; de Alba, Gonzalez-Gaudio, Lankshear, & Peters, 2000; Giroux, 1991; Munro, 1998; Slattery, 1995). When preparing to teach in Bolivia, I conceived the relationship between curriculum study, teachers, and students in term of the question: How can we engage in curriculum design acknowledging and honoring the complexities of curriculum while opening spaces for more democratic practices?

Second was the question of understanding curriculum design and implementation in light of broader historical, economic, political, and cultural context. In my analysis of the Spanish curriculum reform implemented under the socialist government between 1984 and 1998, I argued that the shortcomings of this reform were due to Spanish educators’ inability to understand the ways in which the official curriculum responded to and carried out the neoliberal agenda formulated in the economic and political sphere (Rodríguez, 2001). According to this analysis, the historical moment Spain was experiencing, in particular its formal integration to a European Community and its consequent redefinition in terms of national identity and economic policies, appropriated the curriculum reform to serve a conservative agenda. Also, according to my analysis, this conservative agenda was facilitated by prescribing a curriculum model that canonized the notion of the autonomous and rational individual from the modernist tradition, which neoliberal forces were redefining in terms of the market (Barry, Osborne, & Rose, 1996; Burchell, 1993; Peters, 1996) and that some call “enterprising selves” (Rose, 1992). When preparing this course for Bolivia, I formulated this question as: What are the Bolivian economic, social, cultural, and political contexts in which the curriculum reform is taking place, and what type of discourses and readings are favored by this context?

To pose these two questions to the participants of the course, I decided to include readings from the theoretical perspectives that rendered this line of inquiry important in the first place. *Espacios de identidad. Nuevas visiones del curriculum* [Spaces of Identity. New visions on curriculum], by the Brazilian author Tomaz T. da Silva (2001), was a very useful text in this regard. In this book, Silva attempts to explain the main perspectives that have contributed to the field of curriculum as we know it today and the new perspectives that have recently redefined curriculum in terms of identity and power. He categorizes these perspectives as, respectively, traditionalist, those with an emphasis on objectives and efficiency, critical, those looking at issues of ideology and power, and postcritical, those introducing identity, subjectivity and representation at the core of their analysis. He argues that it is among the latter, for example, feminism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, cultural studies, etc., that we can find some important promises for democratic reforms in education. Such promises, as he implies, do not reside in a specific curriculum design, since most of these theoretical approaches reject easy

systematization, but, rather, in the consideration given to the epistemological critiques brought by these approaches.

The course allotted a substantial amount of time to explore these critiques and to rethink school curriculum in relation to them. From its inception, however, poststructuralism, with its emphasis on discourse and language, was the theoretical framework that I used to conduct the discussion on curriculum. There were three main reasons for this choice. First, it was the poststructuralist analysis on the notion of governmentality advanced by Foucault (1991) and developed by Foucaultian scholars (Barry et al., 1996; Burchell, 1993; Peters, 1996) that helped me to understand the historical construction of the educational subject advanced in neoliberal curriculum reforms. It was through this analysis that I realized the importance of understanding this subject in relation to the social and cultural discourses that articulate this notion in different moments in time (Silva, 1999; Varela, 1991). In Luke's (1999) words, I learned that "there are not educational truths, practices, or phenomena that can be studied outside of discourse" (p. 165). Based on this understanding, I wanted to help the participants in this course to identify the discourses that shaped education in Bolivia in the last two decades and to see these discourses in their historical context.

Second, poststructuralism, as based on Foucault's notions of power and discourse, directs our experience of social change to both the understanding and the transformation of the conflicting discourses that shape our subjectivities within complex relations of power. It also forces us to look at different sites of inequality and to develop a language of critique capable of transforming these relations. Weedon (1987) echoes this focus of attention when conceptualizing poststructuralist feminism and by stating that, to change social practices grounded on hegemonic assumptions, "we need to understand the intricate network of discourses, the sites where they are articulated and the institutionally legitimized forms of knowledge to which they look for justification" (p. 126). Following Weedon's argument, one of my goals for this course was to help the participants to develop a new language to both critique and transform the hegemonic assumptions of the current education reform in Bolivia.

The third and final reason was grounded in the possibilities I envisioned in poststructural theory to identify new links between social identity and power. As many other countries in Latin America, Bolivia became a democratic regime in the early 80s. Also like many other countries in Latin America, this process occurred in a decade marked by aggressive neoliberal reforms demanded by organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Such reforms liberalized and stabilized the economy. Unfortunately, however, they also rapidly deteriorated the already precarious situation of the overwhelming majority of poor people in the country (Morales, 2004). Given this economic context, I thought it was necessary for the participants in this course to interrogate the assumed "democratic nature" of the 1994 Reforms and the connections between the law and the neoliberal policies. Using poststructuralist terms, I was hoping that the participants in the course could identify the tensions between the discourse of neoliberalism and democracy in the Education Reform and the way in which such tensions displaced indigenous knowledge and values even when the country was claiming an intercultural identity.

Based on these theoretical premises, I introduced Silva's book as the primary reading for my part of the course. My intention was to use it as a springboard to a conversation on the different traditions of curriculum and to raise the question of what traditions were most influential in informing, or were capable of informing, curriculum reform in Bolivia. As a part of this conversation, I also introduced an exercise of discourse analysis so participants could develop

new analytical tools to detect the dynamics of power in the curriculum that are usually invisible to traditional readers; in addition, I provided critical perspectives on curriculum analysis. Presenting this material in conversation, I introduced a model of curriculum design based on the theoretical sources of curriculum as suggested by Beyer and Apple (1998), and I asked students to think of the epistemological, political, ideological, ethical, technical, aesthetic, and historical sources of curriculum. I presented these theoretical sources by sharing with the participants in the course specific questions raised by these authors such as: what should count as knowledge? Who shall control the selection and distribution of knowledge? What knowledge has the greatest worth? How shall we treat others responsibly and justly in education? How shall curricular knowledge be made accessible to students? How do we link the curriculum knowledge to the biography and personal meanings of the student? What traditions in the field of curriculum help us to answer these questions?

The final part of my teaching was allotted to the construction of an actual curriculum taking into consideration these theoretical sources and following Gimeno Sacristán's (1998) guidelines for curriculum design. Specific directions in this regard included identifying the main curriculum decisions affecting FyA in the four areas of curriculum decision mapped by Sacristán (national and regional educational administration, teachers—individually and collegially—, textbooks, and the curriculum project developed by each school) and answering the guiding questions that this author provides as the skeleton for the construction of the school curriculum. These questions involved different areas of decision making such as, for example, the methodology and pedagogy chosen by the school to deliver the goals of the curriculum, the way diversity would be addressed by the school community, the use of time and space, the distribution of responsibilities among teachers, students, and administrators, or the way the curriculum would be evaluated. In what follows, I address the conversation on *Espacios de identidad* in more detail, since this was the text that the participants in the course found particularly interesting as it allowed them to become familiar with a new theoretical analysis.

Thinking and Designing Curriculum from a Poststructuralist Perspective

The discussion of *Espacios de identidad* took a day and a half out of the four days allocated to the curriculum planning phase of the course. During this time, participants were asked, in small groups, to take responsibility for individual chapters and to explain these chapters and their theoretical implications to the larger group. They were specifically asked to choose and represent a situation they had experienced or witnessed in schools that could be understood through the theoretical analysis presented in the chapter. This task was enthusiastically received by the participants and created numerous spaces for discussion. According to the participants, the most enriching of these discussions were the ones informed by what Silva (2001) calls postcritical theories. The lack of familiarity of the participants with curriculum approaches informed by postmodernism, feminism, or poststructuralism, for example, made the discussions of this part of the book particularly enlightening to them. This was especially the case when presenting situations dealing with the multicultural reality of the country and when trying to understand the implications of this situation in terms of identity and power and the role that curriculum plays in this regard. Bolivia's popular movements are grounded in a strong Marxist tradition, and Freire's work is very well known in the country. Consequently, participants in this course were familiar with some of the critiques of the curriculum that Silva categorized as critical and the way that these theories explain the marginalization of students, in this case mostly indigenous students. When presented with discussion of the postcritical theories, however, participants discovered

new connections between power and identity by engaging in the new questions presented to them: What are the hegemonic narratives in the curriculum, even a curriculum designed by critical theories, in terms of gender, race, the Western canon, etc.? What are the discourses embedded in educational policies, textbooks, classroom methodologies, etc. that articulate these narratives in our everyday practices in schools?

An exercise that I introduced in the course proved particularly useful for students to understand the discursive nature of new educational practices that are very difficult to identify and, therefore, to change, but that play an important role in constructing new relations of inequality. This exercise was based on critical discourse analysis, a practice grounded on poststructuralist discourse theory and explained by Luke (1999) as an interdisciplinary practice that “focuses on how social relations, identity, knowledge, and power are constructed through written and spoken texts in communities, schools, and classrooms” (p. 161). One of the great promises of this approach is a new understanding of how texts, including curriculum, structure relations of power between human subjects (Luke, 1999). The target of this exercise was mathematics in the new official curriculum.

The emphasis on interculturalism in the 1994 Education Law resulted in the inclusion of indigenous languages and indigenous knowledge in schools. Hence, the new curriculum acknowledged, for the first time, that indigenous students came to school with the separate and distinct mathematic language, referred to as “ethnomathematics” (indigenous systems of counting, measuring distances, weighting, etc.), and that this knowledge was to be as important as what the curriculum calls “mathematics.” When this assumption was submitted to some scrutiny, however, it became clear that the relations of identity and power shaped by this curriculum defined indigenous knowledge or “ethnomathematics” as subjugated to academic knowledge or “mathematics.” This was, at least, the conclusion that the participants reached in this exercise when they were asked to interrogate one of the mathematics texts proposed for the early elementary grades.

The participants looked at two particular questions: How does this text define mathematical culture? How does this text define the relations among cultures in the Bolivian context? When answering these questions, it was clear to the participants that ethnomathematics were considered important only to know the “previous knowledge” of the student, using the language of the reform, and, therefore, only to the extent that it helped educators to teach “mathematics.” Ethnomathematics did not seem to be important in this equation. Rather, it seemed to be a pedagogical tool that, if known by teachers, could help them to “adapt” “mathematics” in a way that students could relate this knowledge to what they already knew. In no case, however, did this curricular text imply a future use of ethnomathematics or, more importantly, a consideration of ethnomathematics as a legitimate body of knowledge that should also be studied by non-indigenous students as a part of the cultural heritage of the country.

The consequences of this dynamic for teaching were evident for the participants in the course. Most teachers were very familiar with, for example, a system of counting based on indigenous traditions and with basis outside the decimal system. This knowledge, however, was never developed in the curriculum or taught to non-indigenous students. Indeed, this knowledge was easily ignored once the teacher used it as a transition to show the student the difference with the decimal system and to make the student knowledgeable in what by implication becomes “Western mathematics.”³

The discussion on postcritical theories raised the inevitable question of: Who is the subject of the curriculum? These theories question the idea of a unified subject removed from the historical

and cultural context that shapes people's everyday life (Giroux, 1991; Rose, 1998; Silva, 1999; Weedon, 1987). Indeed, these theories claim that this subject is fictitious and that it responded to the modernist paradigm with its emphasis on rationality and technology. This critique has brought about new understandings of curriculum that reject neutrality and that look at curriculum as a dynamic process involving particular constructions of knowledge, identity, and power (de Alba et al., 2000; Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998; Slattery, 1995). Among these perspectives, poststructuralist critiques had insisted on the discursive nature of curriculum and on the technocratic grounds upon which we currently engage in curriculum change in liberal societies (Marshall & Peters, 1990; Silva, 1999; Varela, 1991).

According to the analysis advanced by Foucaultian scholars when applying the notion of governmentality to the changes experienced by liberal societies and their transformation into neoliberal regimes, there are new technologies of the self that have come to the fore and that, unless questioned and subverted, would inevitably legitimize the neoliberal version of the modernist, autonomous subject that takes the shape of "homo economicus" (Peters, 1996) or "enterprising self" (Rose, 1992). In more concrete terms, it would create a new truth based on the narrative of the individual as an independent entity, always driven by self-determination, and always able to make the best decisions for his/her own benefit. Contextualizing this critique in the multicultural reality of Bolivia helped the participants in this course to question who was the fictional subject featured in the new intercultural curriculum, what knowledge came to be legitimated in favor of this subject, and what particular educational practices were endorsed in this process. It also helped them to recognize curriculum as a discursive practice that advanced the propositions of neoliberalism by, for example, articulating an idea of the subject based on the individual tradition of the West and not in the notion of the community as practiced by most indigenous traditions in the country.

How to identify and, therefore, to change the technological discourses that do not provide room to talk about issues of identity and power in the curriculum was a question that raised a deep interest among the participants in this course. It was this interest that led them to request a discussion of one of the chapters of my book *Neoliberalismo, educación y género: Análisis crítico de la reforma educativa española* [Neoliberalism, education and gender: Critical analysis of the Spanish education reform], a text that one of the participants had read previous to this course. This chapter argues that the psychological foundation of the official curriculum reform in Spain implemented in the early 1990s made this curriculum a very technocratic one. It further argues that, even when the proposal launched by the Ministry of Education conveyed important democratic principles, the technocratic views embedded in the psychological discourses that defined the student in the curriculum reinforced the equation of teachers as practitioners and experts as designers. The only difference between traditional versions of curriculum design and those based on a psychological understanding of the learner, my argument goes, is that while these traditional versions based design on behavioral objectives and knowledge, the official curriculum proposal in Spain based its design on the psychological knowledge that told us who the students were, how they should be educated, and what the objectives of this education were. As I shared with the participants in this course, these psychological foundations and the technocratic way in which the curriculum was implemented made most school curricula a simple replica of the proposal advanced by the Ministry of Education. According to the official proposal, the goal of education was to create a flexible and critical individual who would be able to adapt to the new European identity of the country and the new economic reality. Also according to this proposal, educational psychology with its understanding of learning,

particularly constructivism, was the main foundation of curriculum. The technicalities involved in this proposal with the emphasis on the language of psychology made teachers feel that they could not “improve” the impeccable official proposal designed by experts in educational psychology and, consequently, for the most part they adapted this proposal uncritically.

There were two things that, in my opinion, made this conversation particularly interesting for the participants. The first one was the fact that Bolivia, as have other countries in Latin American, has adopted a very similar curriculum design to the one developed in Spain. As the participants commented in this discussion, this adoption was particularly problematic in a country like Bolivia in which multiculturalism, and therefore a permanent struggle with issues of identity and power, is a much more visible reality than in Spain. In this regard, a psychological view of the student that defines him or her as an autonomous individual who is removed from his or her historical and social context would inevitably bring new relations of inequality to the curriculum. Indeed, it would dismiss the strong tradition of community within the indigenous groups that prioritize the group above the individual. It is relevant to observe, in this regard, that the quechua language, for example, does not have a word for “I” but has more than one word to refer to “we,” depending on whether the speaker is included, or not, in the statement.

The second reason was the larger context in which Bolivian participants could look at curriculum design. As my analysis in the Spanish curriculum reform has evidenced, the psychological grounds of this curriculum need to be understood in the political, economic, and cultural context in which Spain was undertaking other reforms at the time. In my analysis, this context reflected a neoliberal rationality that redefined the autonomous subject of the modernist tradition into what Rose (1992) calls the “enterprising self.” For Rose, this notion embodies the cultural tenets needed by a society as redefined in terms of the market. In such a society, the market becomes the defining feature for both private and public institutions. Indeed, it becomes the defining feature of the individual to the extent that people are asked to “manage” their own life and to make rational decisions that would supposedly lead to “personal profit.” Not surprisingly, the participants in this course found these connections between the psychologized self and the neoliberal reality in Spain particularly important. Like many other countries in Latin American, Bolivia had experienced a strong neoliberalization of their economy and the inevitable cultural tensions that this process heightens in terms of knowledge and power, particularly for indigenous groups. Put in this context, the question that curriculum design in Bolivia raised for the participants of this course was about the broader implications, considering the economic, political, cultural, and social changes occurring in the country.

Curriculum Design as Empowerment

The rich conversation opened by *Espacios de identidad* and on some of the specific implications of poststructuralist analysis in the curriculum was followed by the construction of school curricula by the participants. As mentioned earlier, the design of this curriculum asked the participants to focus on its theoretical foundations and to map out the different spaces in which decisions need to be made and the constituencies involved in such decisions. Time constraints made it difficult for the participants to fully develop this task. The presentations made at the end of this part, however, clearly evidenced the complexities of our discussions as well as the participants’ abilities to materialize such discussions in an engaging project for their schools. The personal conversations that I held with the participants during and after the four days dedicated to curriculum, as well as the participants’ evaluations also evidenced the deep appreciation that participants have for a non-technological perspective on curriculum. There are many reasons

that, in my opinion, contributed to this appreciation. One of them, however, seems to be particularly relevant for the purposes of this analysis.

As happened to educators in Spain, educators in Bolivia are now experiencing pressure to leave aside the knowledge they have developed in their daily practices and to adopt the curriculum designed by experts. Also as happened in Spain, the adoption of this model occurred as a part of the country's effort to democratize education and to make it more attuned to the demands of a pluralistic society. This made participants in the course feel that they have the "democratic" obligation to implement this curriculum. The fact that postcritical theories questioned the adoption of this model as "democratic" and have rendered the participation of educators crucial to any curriculum implementation was witnessed by the participants of this course as very empowering and reassuring. Indeed, it seems to have helped them to see themselves and their analysis of the reality they experience as instrumental in helping to design more inclusive curricula in schools. This new sense of agency may have been the reason why there was not resistance among participants to the new theoretical propositions presented in the course and the participants' desire to learn more about these perspectives, as they eagerly reflected in the course evaluations.

This is not to say that participants acquired sufficient knowledge of these new theories in this course or that they would not have developed resistance to some of their propositions if we had a chance to continue our discussions. After all, the epistemological claims raised by most of the postcritical perspectives, particularly the way we engage in hegemonic narratives according to poststructuralism theory, target the very core of our belief systems, including faith, and leave us on shaky grounds to develop socially rooted projects in the pursuit of social justice. It was clear to me, however, that participants in the course greatly valued the more sophisticated critiques of education articulated by these theories and that they left the course willing to interrogate both themselves and the educational texts in relation to them.

The Possibilities of Poststructuralism for Collaborations in Inherently Colonial Histories

As the teacher of this course, I found particularly rewarding the way in which participants embraced the poststructuralist perspective from which I presented curriculum design. My sense of achievement, however, went well beyond the usual teaching context in which students are provided with new ways of looking at, in this case, curriculum realities. What generated in me the same sense of empowerment that I saw in the participants was the common language in which both of us had engaged the conversation about school reform. By a "common language," I mean postcritical theories in general and the poststructuralist emphasis on identity and power in particular. By "both of us" I mean not only myself and the participants, but the Western and the non-Western traditions involved in this dialogue. Just as the technocratic perspective of curriculum design represents a "legitimate" knowledge that is given to educators on the basis of particular expertise deemed as important, collaborations between Western and non-Western institutions are all too often grounded upon the assumed expertise of the former. Engaging in poststructuralist theory, however, questions this assumption and forces us to look at the relations of power conveyed by the curriculum, including those inherent in colonial legacies by which curriculum is defined and implemented.

For someone like me, born and raised in Spain and currently living in the U.S., poststructuralist theory holds important promises in terms of the role of curriculum workers in an

international context in education. From this perspective, I see myself as a curriculum theorist helping other curriculum theorists and practitioners in other countries to understand the conflicting discourses that shape their practices and educational knowledge. Indeed, I see myself as working together with curriculum workers in other international contexts to develop counter-hegemonic narratives to those articulated by the discourses, such as neoliberalism, that affect all of us, albeit in many different ways. Unfortunately, poststructuralism, as most of the postcritical theories, does not translate easily into a curriculum design that accounts for all the complexities and possibilities of the critique it brings. It does, however, provide us with new sites of inquiry such as how we are both subjects and agents of discourses that shape relations of power not only among people but, as in this case, among countries and historical traditions.

Within this new site of inquiry, I, as a Spaniard, have to come to terms with the colonial histories of this country in Latin America. I also have to raise the question of whether the implementation of the Spanish curriculum model in Spain, and in several countries of Latin America, is not yet another element of this colonial history toward those living outside of the liberal tradition of the West by providing a very specific definition of the educational subject in the curriculum. Currently living in a country that epitomizes the Westernized tradition of knowledge and culture, I can name this curriculum now as neoliberal and as one that, by definition, imposes notions of the self and the curriculum based in Western views. Hence, I can argue that those discourses that we engage in when reforming education in United States, Spain, or Bolivia are not unrelated. Quite to the contrary, I would argue that while our historical positions may be different in experiencing and understanding such discourses, it is only by recognizing their commonality that we can work together for better education. In this sense, understanding the discourse of psychologization in the curriculum is not only a tool of empowerment for the educators in Bolivia who struggle for the inclusion of different knowledges in schools but for all of us as well. After all, it is the same discourse that marginalizes many students in U.S. schools because the personal and cultural contexts of our students defy the current neoliberal definition of the individual. The four days I shared with the participants in this course in Bolivia made me think of collaborations such as this as very important to understanding the real possibilities for educational change in a moment in which neoliberalism imposes its views everywhere in the world. Indeed, it is by identifying the way in which this is happening right now in countries such as Bolivia that we can substantially increase our awareness of how this neoliberal view is building new and complex relations of power in our schools every day.

NOTES

1. Since 2002, the collaboration between these two organizations has evolved into several initiatives such as: an annual ten-day immersion trip to Bolivia by faculty and staff from our university; immersion trips for members of FyA to Saint Joseph's University and other Jesuit programs in surrounding communities; a master's degree scholarship provided to a member of FyA to pursue an MBA at Saint Joseph's University; two study tour courses (that I conducted) for education students at Saint Joseph's University to visit FyA schools in Bolivia, and several personal exchanges between members of the two institutions.
2. I would like to clarify here that, although I work in a Jesuit institution, I am neither a religious person nor a supporter of faith-based education. Indeed, when I first learned about FyA, I had to overcome my own background of resistance to work with a religious institution in compulsory education. There were two reasons, however, that prompted my involvement with this organization. First, despite the colonial heritage of faith-based education in Latin America, FyA has been providing formal and non-formal education to students that, otherwise, would not have access to any type of education. Because of the lack of resources of governments such as Bolivia—a situation for which, undoubtedly, the Catholic Church is also responsible—the state does not have enough revenues to provide

school coverage to all students. In this context, the work of FyA is very important and advances the well being of entire communities. Secondly, I have always been impressed by the critical consciousness and commitment to social justice of the people working in FyA. This was evident in the dynamics of the course and the openness of the participants to pursue any new ideas that may help them in this pursuit even when these ideas questioned the participants' own assumptions.

3. The disregard for indigenous knowledge revealed in this exercise is one of the reasons why the government of Evo Morales, the new indigenous president of the country elected in December 2005, has decided to change the 1994 Education Reform. The first Minister of Education under the new administration, Felix Patxi, has conceptualized the new proposal around the concept of the “decolonization” of education and has advanced a bilingual program that will also require students from non-indigenous traditions to learn indigenous subjects.

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