

TRANSFORMATIONS OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION IN THE ECUADORIAN ANDES

Transformaciones de la educación comunitaria en los Andes ecuatorianos

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Abstract

This paper recovers some of the results of the research developed by the author in the framework of his doctoral thesis. The article analyzes the impact that the educational changes promoted by the Government of Rafael Correa had on the dynamics of community-based indigenous education initiatives. The research was based on the contributions of Critical Pedagogy and Latin American Anthropology: from the first it took the concept of education as a cultural and political practice, while from the second it recovered the analytical perspective of the Theory of Cultural Control. Related to the methodology, the research analyzed an emblematic experience of indigenous education in the country: the Cotopaxi Indigenous School System (CISS), and data was collected through oral history and documentary analysis. The hypothesis that this paper seeks to argue is that the Government of Rafael Correa, in its commitment to regain the rectory of the education and modernize it, ended up subsuming all the scopes of decision of the educative task that were in the hands of the communities and the indigenous schools of the study area, and homogenizing their educational projects under the parameters of the Hispanic education. The paper is organized in three parts: the first one describes the trajectory of the indigenous schools from its birth until 2007. The second part makes an account of the educational policies that had more impact on the dynamics of schools. The last one analyzes the impact those policies had on the daily life of schools.

Keywords

State, educational policies, indigenous education, indigenous peoples, Ecuador.

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Resumen

El artículo recupera algunos de los resultados de la investigación desarrollada por el autor en el marco de su tesis doctoral. El artículo analiza el impacto que los cambios educativos impulsados por el Gobierno del Economista Rafael Correa tuvieron en la dinámica de las iniciativas de educación indígena de carácter comunitario. La investigación se fundamentó en los aportes de la Pedagogía Crítica y de la Antropología Latinoamericana: de la primera tomó el concepto de educación como práctica cultural y política, mientras que de la segunda recuperó la perspectiva analítica de la Teoría del Control Cultural. En términos metodológicos, se optó por analizar una experiencia de educación indígena emblemática del país: el Sistema de Escuelas Indígenas de Cotopaxi (CISS); y para la recolección de información se trabajó a partir de la historia oral y el análisis documental. La hipótesis que se busca argumentar es que el Gobierno de Rafael Correa, en su apuesta por recuperar la rectoría de la educación y en su afán por modernizarla, terminó subsumiendo todos los ámbitos de decisión del quehacer educativo que estuvieron en manos de las comunidades y las escuelas indígenas de la zona de estudio, y homogeneizando su oferta educativa bajo los parámetros de la educación hispana. El artículo se encuentra organizado en tres partes: en la primera se describe la trayectoria del CISS, desde su nacimiento hasta el 2007. En la segunda se hace un recuento de las políticas educativas que más impacto tuvieron en la dinámica del CISS. Y, en la última, se discute el impacto que dichas políticas tuvieron en el día a día de las escuelas comunitarias.

Palabras clave

Estado, políticas educativas, educación indígena, pueblos indígenas, Ecuador.

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Introduction

As of 2007, the Government of the Economist Rafael Correa promoted important changes at the level of the organizational structure of Ecuadorian education, among which the process of unification of the education system and the consequent process of dismantling the intercultural bilingual education system stand out. With the dismantling of the bilingual intercultural education system, the indigenous schools were exposed to the decisions and policies of the education minister and his work team, through the new administrative bodies created by the Organic Law of Intercultural Education: the zonal coordinators and the district management.

The objective of this article is to analyze the way in which indigenous schools experienced the educational transformations promoted by the Government of Rafael Correa, and the impact that these transformations caused on two basic dimensions of their educational project: the management model and the training proposal.

The research was theoretically based on the contributions of Critical Pedagogy and the Theory of Cultural Control. From the first we recovered the concept of education as a cultural and political practice, which is, as a practice conditioned by the social and political context, and oriented towards the production and regulation of discourses, meanings

and subjectivities (Giroux, 1995). From the Theory of Cultural Control we took the concept of cultural control and its perspective to interpret the interactions that take place between cultural groups that coexist in asymmetric and dominated conditions (Bonfil, 1991).

Both contributions were very useful for the investigation because they contributed to understand the tensions unleashed between the Government of Rafael Correa and the indigenous communities as a relation of dispute for the control of education in rural areas and the definition of its meaning; and to ask about the areas that were the subject of the dispute and the strategies that were put into play.

In methodological terms, the research chose to carry out the case study of an indigenous education experience emblematic of the country: the Cotopaxi Indigenous School System (CISS), an initiative developed by the indigenous communities of the western highlands of the Cotopaxi Province. The cut made for the analysis was June 2014, the month in which the school year of the Sierra ended, which began in September 2013, and in which the process of forming the district directorates in the Province of Cotopaxi ended.

Regarding the collection of information, fundamentally, it was based on oral history (Ripamonti, 2015), due not only to the scarcity of written sources related to the research problem, but also to the need to recover the voice of the actors who promoted and lived the changes that took place in the study area. In this line, we had the opportunity to interview managers and community educators of the CISS, directors and sub-directors of the old Educational Networks, officials of the Provincial Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education of Cotopaxi (DIPEIB-C) and the District Directorate de Pujilí- Saquisilí, and the president of the Cotopaxi Indigenous Movement.

The work of gathering information was completed with the documentary analysis carried out in the archive of the CISS, of the Salesian inspectorate, of the DIPEIB-C, and in the Abya-Yala documentary center of the Salesian Polytechnic University.

The hypothesis that is sought to argue in the text that follows is that the Government of Rafael Correa, in its commitment to recover the rectorship of education and in its eagerness to modernize it, ended up subsuming all areas of decision of educational work that were in hands of the communities and the indigenous schools of the study area, and homogenizing their educational offerings under the parameters of Hispanic education.

The article is organized in three parts. The first one describes, briefly, the trajectory of the CISS from its birth to 2007, the year in which the government of Rafael Correa began its administration. In the second part, a mapping is made of those government educational policies that, from the perspective of the educational actors of the CISS, were the ones that most altered the daily dynamics of the schools. And, in the last one, the impact that these policies had on the day to day of the indigenous schools is discussed.

Trajectory of the System of Indigenous Schools of Cotopaxi

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The CISS was an initiative of indigenous education that was born in 1975 in the western highlands of the province of Cotopaxi, in which at the moment constitute the parishes of Zumbahua and Chugchilán. It was an initiative gestated by the indigenous leaders, together with the support of the Zumbahua Pastoral Team; and that sought to meet the training demands of the communities in the area.

In the 70s, the communities in question were engaged in the implementation of an interesting project of endogenous development, whose main axes were the recovery of land, control of the commercialization of agricultural products, and access to spaces of local power (Guerrero, 1992). Within the framework of this project, the CISS came to play a central role, as it contributed to develop in the population of the area certain key skills, among which the learning of reading and writing¹, the management of basic mathematical operations and the development of an “own thought” (Herrán, 2008).

In terms of the organizational model, the CISS was an initiative of a communitarian nature in every sense of the word. Not only was gestated and sustained by the communities, but that - and this is the most relevant - it was controlled and directed by them. The communities were the ones that defined the profile of the educators and had the power to select them and remove them from the position, in case they did not comply with what was expected. Similarly, the communities were responsible for defining the objectives of the training process, as well as monitoring and validating the work of educators on a day-to-day basis.

In curricular matters, the training proposal was oriented to develop the objectives stated above, and was structured in five areas of knowledge: Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Spanish and

Kichwa; each of which had its own materials (the “notebooks”) for work with the students. On a day-to-day basis, the language of instruction was the Kichwa and the methodology of work was strongly influenced by the contributions of Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of Liberation (Poaquiza, 2013) and the methodological contributions of Monsignor Leonidas Proaño.

From 1975 to 1988, the CISS operated without recognition of the State and, in many of the communities, clandestinely². In 1988, the CISS was recognized by the State, and, starting in 1989, the year in which bilingual intercultural education became official in Ecuador, the CISS became part of the bilingual intercultural education jurisdiction and responded to the policies of the National Direction of Intercultural Bilingual Education, and its representative at the provincial level: the Provincial Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education of Cotopaxi.

The entrance of the CISS to the jurisdiction of bilingual intercultural education implied important changes in its structure and form of management, among which the loss of control of the communities over several sensitive aspects of the educational process, such as: the definition of the profile of the educators, the selection and dismissal of those, the training and follow-up of educators, among others. Over the years, all these attributions passed into the hands of the Provincial Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education of Cotopaxi.

In 2000, eleven years after the CISS became part of the State, the initiative experienced again a set of important changes due to its participation in the Project of the Networks of the Community Centers of Intercultural Bilingual Education, decentralization education project promoted by the Ecuadorian State with financing from the Inter-American Development Bank (Ponce, 2010). Within the framework of this project, the CISS managed to distance itself from the regulations of the Provincial Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education of Cotopaxi and recovered several of the powers it previously had: the selection and dismissal of educators, the training of educators and their follow-up, the curricular definition and the production of materials, among others.

One of the most valued recovered attributes by the people and the directors of the schools was that related to the selection of the educators, because they could return, as in the initial moment, to recruit community members who fulfilled the prioritized requirements by the communities: be a native of the community, master the mother tongue of the area, and have demonstrated commitment to the development of the community.

In 2005 the financing of the Project of the Networks of the Community Centers of Intercultural Bilingual Education concluded, although



the management model remained a few years longer. For 2007, the year in which the government of Rafael Correa began, the CISS continued to live under the structure of the networks and under the supervision of the Provincial Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education of Cotopaxi, with the same powers, but without the financing of the first period.

This has been the trajectory of the CISS until 2007. Let's now turn to review the educational policies of the Government of Rafael Correa that had the most impact on the day-to-day dynamics of the CISS.

The educational policies of the Government of Rafael Correa

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Before talking about the educational policies of the Government of Rafael Correa, it is necessary to refer to the process of dismantling the bilingual intercultural education system, since it constitutes the starting point and the backdrop of the changes experienced by indigenous education initiatives in the country.

In the process of dismantling the bilingual intercultural education system, two central moments can be distinguished: a first moment in which indigenous organizations lost control over bilingual intercultural education, as a result of Executive Decree 1585; and a second moment in which the dissolution of the bilingual intercultural education jurisdiction is favored, as a result of the approval of the Organic Law of Intercultural Education in 2011.

The arguments handled by the government at both times were of a different nature, but they always ended up referring to the issue of the low quality of indigenous education, due to the mismanagement of certain indigenous leaders, and the need for the Direction of indigenous education to go through the Ministry of Education. On this last point, we agree with Muyolema (2015) that this approach is based on the tacit consideration that the National Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education was not part of the Ministry of Education, and that it did not respond to its guidelines, this was by itself preposterous because in the day to day, all its officials had to be recognized and ratified by the minister on duty.

The dismantling of the system of intercultural bilingual education was a conflictive process and generated strong resistance from the indigenous organizations (the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador and Ecuador Runakunapak Rikcharimuy, fundamentally), which processed the issue as an attack on first order against their rights as

peoples and, in particular, against their right to take charge of their education, recognized by the Political Constitution of Ecuador and several international treaties, such as Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization or the Declaration of the United Nations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

With the dismantling of the intercultural bilingual education system and, in particular, with the dissolution of the Provincial Directorates of Intercultural Bilingual Education, the indigenous schools were exposed to the policies and initiatives of the education minister and his work team, through the zonal coordinations and, fundamentally, through the district directorates that were the ones that had the most contact with the schools³.

In what follows, we will refer to the policies and educational initiatives of the Government of Rafael Correa that, from the perspective of the actors linked to the CISS, had a greater impact in rural areas and altered the daily life of the community schools: the program of fusion of the educative establishments, the educative units of the millennium, the project of curricular update and fortification, the evaluation of the teachers and the students, the qualification of the teachers, and the regulation of the procedure of entrance to the teaching profession.

The program of fusion of educational establishments

With the purpose of ordering and rationalizing the educational offer of the State, the government promoted the program of fusion of educational establishments that consisted in bringing together in the same educational establishment the students and teachers of several small establishments in the same area. In the medium term, the objective was to have educational institutions that contemplated “(...) a complete educational offer (Initial Education, Basic Education and High school), specialized teachers, modern infrastructure, cutting edge equipment and school transport in dispersed areas” (Ministry of Education of Ecuador, 2015).

The fusion program sought to solve several of the most sensitive problems of Ecuadorian education, among which stand out a disorderly and disjointed educational offer, incomplete educational institutions, educational institutions with precarious infrastructure and without the necessary equipment, and institutions with shortages of Teachers (Ministry of Education of Ecuador, 2015). The goal was to pass, according to statements by the Minister of Education at the time, of 19,023 educational

institutions distributed in a disorderly manner and without technical criteria, to 5,189 quality educational institutions and with all the necessary educational services, in 2017 (Ministry of Education from Ecuador, 2013).

In several areas of the country, especially in rural areas, the merger program generated a lot of discomfort and complaints from the population and organizations, as it meant the closure, or the threat of closure, of those community schools that operated for decades attending to the specific training demands of the communities, many of which were raised and sustained by the communities themselves. It is estimated that between the beginning of 2013 and the end of 2014, more than 10,000 small schools were closed, including community schools, uni-teacher, bilingual intercultural and alternative schools (Walsh, 2014).

Faced with the demands of the population and organizations, the government responded by disqualifying those schools, arguing that these were “poverty schools” that contributed to reproduce the exclusion of the indigenous population (El Comercio, 2014). It was in this context that the imaginary of the community schools was generated as low quality schools, and that they needed to be closed to make way for complete, modern and excellent schools; that they would bet for the formation of the necessary human resource to propitiate the economic, political and social transformations that the country required.

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The educational units of the millennium

Connected with the previous topic is the program of the educational units of the millennium. It is an initiative that originated in June 2008 and whose main objective was to contribute to the improvement of the quality of education in the country, through the construction of first class educational units, both in terms of infrastructure and equipment, and in terms of its management model and educational offer (Minteguiga, 2014).

The program of the educational units of the millennium was considered by the Government of Rafael Correa as the reference of the new public education in the country, and as the ideal initiative to realize the educational rights and guarantees recognized in the Political Constitution of Ecuador, in the different international commitments, State policies and the Ten-Year Education Plan (Luna, 2014).

According to information released by the Ministry of Education, by June 2015, a total of 52 educational units had been built and were in operation, another 34 educational units were being built, and at the

project level, 207 more units were being built. In the planning of the government, the construction of a total of 900 new millennium educational units was envisaged until 2017, to which we should add what is known as the repowering, which involves the implementation of adaptations to existing educational units (Ministry of Education of Ecuador, 2015).

Much has been discussed about the millennium units in the country and their impact, and although there are no systematic evaluations and studies on the subject, by testimonials from teachers and academics who have visited some of them⁴, it would seem that in these units those innovations that have to do with the material dimensions of educational quality (first-class infrastructure, sophisticated laboratories, state-of-the-art equipment, etc..) have prevailed over those dimensions that make reference to the educational model itself and its different components.

By June 2014, a millennium educational unit was in full operation in the area under study: Cacique Tumbalá Educational Unit, in the Zumbahua Parish; and two more units were under construction: the Chone Educational Unit, in the Angamarca Parish, and the Canchagua Educational Unit in the parish of the same name (Hurtado, 2014). As we will see later, the Cacique Tumbalá Educational Unit was the one that absorbed the students and teachers of the two community schools in the Zumbahua area that were closed within the framework of the program of fusion of establishments.

The reform of the Hispanic basic education curriculum

In the curricular field, it stands out, along with the reform of high school curriculum and the definition of the initial education curriculum, the reform process of the Hispanic basic education curriculum promoted during the first years of government administration, and which is known in the country as the *update and curricular strengthening of basic general education*.

The reform process of the Hispanic basic education curriculum was an initiative that was framed within the guidelines of the Ten-Year Education Plan and that responded, in a punctual manner, to the policy of improving the quality of education. The reform sought to solve several of the problems diagnosed in the implementation of the basic education curriculum, among which “(...) the disarticulation between the levels, the insufficient precision of the subjects that should be taught in each year of study, the lack of clarity of the skills that should be developed, and the lack of criteria and essential evaluation indicators” (Ministry of Education of Ecuador, 2010).

In line with the diagnosed problems, and with a view to updating the curriculum, the reform contemplated the following objectives:

- Update the 1996 curriculum in its social, scientific and pedagogical projections.
- Specify, up to a meso-curricular level, the skills and knowledge that students should learn, by area and year.
- Offer viable methodological guidelines for teaching and learning, in order to contribute to the professional performance of teachers.
- Formulate essential evaluation indicators that allow assessing student learning as well as compliance with the objectives set by area and year.
- Promote, from the curricular projection, an inclusive educational process, strengthen the formation of a citizenship for Good Living, in the context of an intercultural and plurinational society (Ministry of Education of Ecuador, 2010).

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In order to ensure the implementation of the new curricular proposal, the reform included the preparation of new school texts for each level and area of study, as well as work guides for teachers.

Undoubtedly, this is an initiative of supreme importance for the problems that concern us because, as we will see later, the process of educational standardization promoted in the CISS schools was based on the results of this reform process. By June 2014, the CISS schools were aligned with the new curriculum and both their teachers and their students were using the texts and work guides developed by the ministry.

The evaluation of students and teachers

Up to this point, reference has been made to the great initiatives of the government in educational matters. However, the government also promoted other smaller initiatives that also had a significant impact on the day-to-day life of the CISS schools. Among them are the evaluation of the performance of students and teachers, the training and professional development of teachers, and the implementation of a new procedure for entering the teaching profession. In the following we will refer only to the evaluation of students and teachers, since the other two initiatives will be explained in the next section, when we talk about the changes that schools experienced.

As of 2009, the Ministry of Education implemented a new system to evaluate the performance of students and teachers⁵, whose main purpose was to generate accurate and reliable information on the performance of students and teachers that would allow, in turn, the implementation from “(...) didactic-pedagogical actions that favor the learning processes of the students, and the improvement of the initial teacher training, as well as their professional development” (Ministry of Education of Ecuador, 2015).

In the case of the students, the evaluation was applied in the fourth, seventh and tenth levels of basic education, and consisted in the rendering of automated tests on the different areas of study. In the case of teachers, the evaluation contemplated two moments: the internal evaluation that consisted of an assessment of the teacher’s performance by the different educational actors: students, teachers, principals, and parents; and the external evaluation that consisted in giving a test of general knowledge, specific knowledge and reading ability (Ministry of Education of Ecuador, 2015).

The implementation of the teaching evaluation generated a lot of resistance on the part of the teachers, especially in the first moments, since it was considered a procedure with punitive ends, rather than a strategy aimed at promoting the improvement of the teachers’ performance and the quality of education. The measure even led to an indefinite strike of teachers led by the National Union of Educators. As a result of a negotiation process between the government and the National Union of Educators, the evaluation system was institutionalized in the country (Luna, 2014).

The impact of policies on CISS schools

How did the CISS schools live the new educational scenario fostered in the context of the Rafael Correa government? What was the impact of the initiatives described above on the day-to-day of the schools? In what follows we will try to answer these questions.

The loss of control of education

“Everything comes to us from above, nothing is decided here below” (Sigcha, 2014) is the phrase with which one of the educators of the CISS⁶, concludes his explanation about the changes that were lived in the CISS schools in the context of the Government of Rafael Correa. And since 2007, indigenous schools experienced a gradual, but irreversible, process

of loss of the attributions that they won in the context of the Intercultural Bilingual Community Center Networks Project.

One of the sensitive areas in which the people and the CISS lost control was that of the selection and dismissal of teachers, an area that is highly valued by both the directors of the schools and the community members of the area, as has allowed them to ensure that the new teachers fulfilled those requirements considered central from the beginning of the educational initiative: to be indigenous, native of the community, linked to the work of the community and to speak Kichwa.

With the new management model, the process of selecting teachers was passed on to the Ministry of Education, and processed through a merit contest that included a knowledge test, the evaluation of their experience and a class demonstration. At first glance, it would give the impression that it was an adequate procedure to choose the best candidate, and that it could have contributed to strengthen the teaching teams of the CISS schools; but in practice it was not like that, because this procedure had more negative effects than positive ones. And it is that the new procedure not only complicated the entrance of the people of the zone to the teaching team of the schools of their respective communities, but it propitiated the arrival of teachers without any type of connection with the communities and that they had nothing to do with bilingual intercultural education and the indigenous world⁷.

The other sensitive area in which schools lost control was the training of teachers. Under the new scenario, the CISS lost the capacity to organize its own training processes, since the training was centralized in the hands of the Ministry of Education, under the figure of “continuous training”. In accordance with current regulations, the Ministry of Education was exclusively responsible for the training of teachers.

For the continuous training of teachers, the ministry designed a varied package of courses that covered all areas of the national curriculum. Thus, courses related to early education, courses on the different areas of knowledge of basic education, courses on the specialty subjects of the baccalaureate: Natural Sciences, Mathematics, etc. were contemplated. These courses were joined by others that addressed transversal issues such as Inclusion and diversity or Prevention of violence and education for peace. Finally, there were those courses that worked in special areas such as Special and Inclusive Education, Information Technology, among others (Ministry of Education of Ecuador, 2015).

Although most of the interviewed educators recognized that the courses of the ministry that they took addressed relevant topics and that

they were useful for the daily classroom work, they also proposed that the courses, insofar as they adhered to the standard curriculum, did not consider the approach or the particularities of intercultural bilingual education. In fact, if the offer of the courses offered by the ministry is reviewed in detail, it can be stated that it included a single course related to the subject, which was called “Intercultural Bilingual Education” and that was within the category of “Special courses” along with the one of Inclusive Education and Psychology and Computer science.

The standardization of the educational project

Up to this point, reference has been made to the loss of control of schools over two central aspects of the educational process, such as the selection of teachers and their training. However, the loss occurred not only in these areas, but also in relation to the educational project itself. In the context of the new scenario, the schools experienced a process of standardization of their educational project, a process that, in practice, meant the dismantling of their original educational project. Let's review the most relevant elements of that process. One of the central effects of the government's educational policies was that the bilingual intercultural schools and those of the CISS, in particular, had to put aside their educational projects to take on the curricular proposal of Hispanic education and, in a special way, the syllabi generated in the updating and curricular strengthening process promoted by the ministry in 2007. The argument used referred to the low quality of intercultural bilingual education in the province, in general, and the low learning outcomes of the schools in the area, in particular.

En un inicio, los educadores del CISS no acataron la disposición y siguieron trabajando con la malla propia, pero al poco tiempo tuvieron que asumirla, pues no solo se intensificaron las visitas y el control por parte de los supervisores de las direcciones distritales, sino que los docentes sabían que el ministerio iba a seguir evaluando a sus estudiantes usando los parámetros de la nueva propuesta curricular y que aquello, más temprano que tarde, iba a tener repercusiones negativas sobre ellos mismos, si los estudiantes obtenían bajos resultados.

The impact of the curricular change at the students' level was very strong, not only because of the amount and complexity of the contents that it entailed, but also because of the new way of working in the classroom that was implicit. In relation to the first, the new program meant



for the students not only an important increase in the amount of content that should be learned in each academic year, but also a higher level of complexity of the same, especially those in the area of Math. Both changes demanded an important effort on the part of the students, and caused, not infrequently, that several of them were falling by the wayside and opted to leave the school.

Regarding the second point, the application of the curriculum meant a radical change at the level of the daily work in the classroom, because unlike the curriculum of the CISS that fostered an articulated work between the different areas and based on problems of the context, the new curriculum propitiated a disjointed work between the subjects and focused on the disciplinary knowledge, aspect that made that many of the times the students did not understand the meaning of what they learned.

The other relevant issue in relation to the educational project has to do with the language of teaching. Along with the disposition to apply the curriculum of Hispanic education, from the ministry there was a willingness to work in Spanish. The arguments were of a different type but the most frequent were those that made reference again to the low quality of intercultural bilingual education⁸, but also to the new educational context in the country.

Faced with this situation, the exit strategy of the schools was to convert Kichwa into a subject. Because this was not legal, as the curriculum of Hispanic education did not contemplate hours for that language, nor was it endorsed by the ministry, the number of hours devoted to Kichwa was very few, since they had to take hours to other subjects. In some cases two hours a week were included, while in others only one hour a week.

In certain cases, and contrary to the provisions of the district directorate, the teachers of the CISS schools were forced to keep Kichwa in their classes, as it was the only way to promote learning in children, especially in those distant communities, in which the children spoke fundamentally Kichwa and had a very precarious handling of Spanish.

The closing of community schools

Like the rest of the country, the rural areas of the province of Cotopaxi and, especially, those areas of incidence of the CISS were also the object of intervention of the program of reorganization of the educational offer promoted by the Ministry of Education with the objective to strengthen and rationalize the supply of public education in the country. By June

2014, the date on which the cut was made for the analysis, three indigenous schools in the area had been closed⁹, several more were on the waiting list, and were the subject of daily conversation in schools and communities. The closed schools were those of the Communities of Talatac, Yanaturo and Saraucsha, all of them located in the upper zone of the Parish of Zumbahua.

In the Community of Saraucsha the closing of the school had special nuances¹⁰, since in that community operated two schools: one belonging to the bilingual intercultural jurisdiction and the other to the Hispanic jurisdiction. Although at the beginning the project was for the students and teachers of the indigenous school to move to the educational unit of the millennium, similar to what happened with the other two schools, that did not end up being concreted by the opposition of the people, mainly by the issue of distance, but also because of the uncertainty of how the experience of their children would be in the educational unit of the millennium¹¹.

Faced with the opposition of parents, the Provincial Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education of Cotopaxi¹² decided not to move the students and teachers to the educational unit of the millennium and chose, rather, to merge the two schools into one. In the facilities of the indigenous school, the seventh, eighth and ninth levels became operational; while in the Hispanic school, the rest of the levels began to operate, including initial education. The director of the Hispanic school became the director of the new institution.

The merger generated discomfort in the students of the indigenous school but also in the teachers and parents of the two schools. In relation to the students, the discomfort had to do, fundamentally, with the curriculum of studies and with the language used inside and outside the classroom, since the fusion meant an accelerated change to the curriculum of the ministry, the use of texts designed by the ministry, and the imposition of Spanish as a daily language of classes, an aspect that, as we saw above, brought different types of complications.

In the case of the teachers, the discomfort also had to do with the curriculum and the working language, for the reasons discussed above, but especially with the relations with the teachers of the Hispanic school, a situation that also affected the parents of family. And it is that the process of fusion put, from one moment to another, in the same space, teachers and parents who lived separated for a long time and in tension, and sometimes in open conflict, due to the fact of belonging to schools of different jurisdictions.



However, until now reference has been made to the process of effective closure of schools. It is necessary, however, to allude to the threat of closure of many more schools that lived in the area, because that also caused discomfort, uncertainty and responses of a different nature. By June 2014, more than twenty CISS schools were threatened with closure, according to notifications from the teams of the respective district offices.

The notifications generated a lot of uncertainty in the area. The issue of distance to the new schools was one of the issues that most worried the parents, since from previous closure experiences they knew that, initially, there was not going to be transportation offered by the Ministry of Education. The other issue that caused concern in parents was that their children had to go to study in communities that were not to their liking. And it is that, as happened in other rural areas of the country, in the area of incidence of the CISS had developed from time ago different types of conflicts between communities, and parents resisted the idea that their children moved to study in those communities with which they had problems.

Several were the projects that were considered among the parents of the schools with risk of closing, being the most recurrent the one to take their children to study in the cities to which they migrated for labor issues. Another project that began to strongly circulate in the area, especially in those remote communities, and for which reaching the new schools would have taken a long time, was "(...) reopening the schools in the same communities, but as informal ones, as they were at the beginning of the CISS" (Herrera, 2015).

To close this point, it is worth mentioning that both the closure of schools and the threat of closure was a very important issue in the area, not only for the reasons we have explained above, but also because most of them were created and sustained for decades by the same communities. To that extent, the merger project was processed and lived by the communities as an attempt by the government to take away their schools and appropriate their education.

Conclusions

From the previously discussed, and in light of the perspective of the theory of cultural control (Bonfil, 1991) it can be concluded that the dismantling of the bilingual intercultural education jurisdiction and the rearrangement of the educational scenario caused by the different policies promoted by the Government of Rafael Correa, meant not only a process

of alienation of the education of the area and the consequent loss of control on the part of the indigenous communities, but also a simultaneous process of suppression of its historical educational project and imposition of a new one.

An allusion is made to a simultaneous process of suppression of thier historical educational project and imposition of a new one, as the changes promoted by the Government of Rafael Correa meant not only the dismantling of the original educational project in the area, but, and at the same time, the implantation of a new educative project: the one that before the dissolution of the jurisdiction of bilingual intercultural education constituted the project of the Hispanic education.

By June 2104, the month in which the investigation was cut, what was done in the CISS schools was similar to what was done in any other school in the area. The only thing that differentiated them was the presence of some educators who participated in the initiative since the beginning of the experience in 1975, the memory of what the CISS was and meant for the area in the span of its almost forty years of life, and the desire for better times to come, times in which, as one of the oldest educators of the CISS pointed out, “(...) education would be controlled from below” (Sigcha, 2014).

The situation experienced by the CISS schools is quite similar to the experience of indigenous schools in other areas of the country, reported by ethnographic studies such as Martín and Rodríguez (2016) or Rodríguez (2015), and reports a tendency, apparently, of national scope. The fact is that the dismantling of the bilingual intercultural education system left all indigenous schools in the country vulnerable, regardless of the region, the type of relationship they maintained with the communities, nor the place they occupied in the collective their project.

What has been analyzed thus far brings to the table specific elements to reflect on the way in which the “left” governments of the region, such as that of the Economist Rafael Correa, have processed the problem of the exclusion of indigenous peoples and their demands in educational matter. Contrary to the good intentions expressed in the discursive sphere and legal regulations, it would seem that in Ecuador there was a political project that ended up co-opting and dismantling the education of indigenous peoples. In this line, we agree with Higuera and Castillo (2015), that in the context of the government in question the issue of “interculturality” and “plurinationality” was more a programmatic statement, than a transformative political practice.



What has been analyzed up to this point also raises concrete elements to think about the viability of intercultural bilingual education in Ecuador, as a political and epistemic project of indigenous peoples and nationalities (Illicachi, 2015), and, in a timely manner, on the conditions policies and institutions necessary to ensure control of that by indigenous communities.

Notes

- 1 The level of illiteracy in the area in question, in the 1970s, was alarming. In 1974, more than 80% of the indigenous population over eight years old was illiterate, a situation that was even more critical in the case of women (Martínez & Burbano, 1994).
- 2 They operated clandestinely because of the negative experience they had with the landowners in the area, who did not see with good eyes the birth of the schools or the indigenous people being educated (Alomoto, 2014).
- 3 For 2014, the educational circuits, the most concrete level of management, have not yet been organized in the area under study.
- 4 Among these stand out the testimonies of Rosa María Torres: Goodbye to community and alternative education (2014) and Visit to a Millennium Educational Unit (s/f).
- 5 The system also included the evaluation of the performance of school managers, but in our case we are only interested in the evaluation of students and teachers.
- 6 We have changed the names of the members of the management team and the educators of the SEIC, as well as the directors of the CECIB Networks
- 7 Situation that refers us to the problem of the unintended effects of meritocratic selection procedures, procedures legitimized, repeatedly, by the Government of Rafael Correa. And it is that the meritocracy, far from being a system that promotes democracy, is a system that ends up benefiting those individuals who, thanks to different factors, have been able to capitalize the valued merits; individuals that in the case of our country, in general, do not belong to the indigenous population of the lower class.
- 8 As in the case of the provision of the application of the curriculum of education, the provision of working in Spanish was justified with the argument that the quality of education in the area was low and that it had to do, among other things, with the fact that the students did not understand the language with which they were taught in schools: the Kichwa; argument that may have been valid for a small percentage of students, but not for the bulk of them, whose mother tongue was still Kichwa.
- 9 Although from the Ministry of Education there was talk of a process of merging the establishments, the people of the area experienced the process as the closing of their educational institutions.
- 10 We will only refer to the closure of this school, because of the three it was the only one that was part of the SEIC.
- 11 The fact of having two schools in the same community was not uncommon in rural areas in Ecuador, because indigenous schools were often created in the same area where a Hispanic school already existed, and it was done because the Hispanic school did not respond to the expectations of the people.
- 12 This school was also closed during the period in which the provincial bilingual intercultural education directorate was still in operation.

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