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Relationships and tensions between the curricular program and the lived curriculum. A narrative research

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HIGHLIGHTS

- The teaching profession juggles between two curricular worlds: the curricular program and the lived curriculum.
- Although the two curricular worlds are in tension, they are not mutually exclusive.
- The tension between the two curricular worlds is inherent in the educational profession.
- The origins of the tensions existing in the professional teaching landscape are epistemological.
- In order to live curricular tensions fruitfully teachers must listen to student's whole life story.

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ABSTRACT

This research focused on the relationships that teachers and students establish with curricular programs, the tensions they experience, and the effects this has on shaping the classroom experience. The study employed a narrative research approach using observation and conversational interviews, with fieldwork conducted over two school years with two teachers. It was found that (1) the teaching profession juggles between the two curricular worlds (the curricular program and the lived curriculum), (2) inherent educational practice tensions were generated, and (3) methods needed to be identified to harness these tensions fruitfully to avoid conflict.

1. Introduction

The[1] most common European educational and curricular systems were inspired by a technical objective-based pedagogy model (Gimeno, 1988; Pérez-Gómez, 2012). Although current discussions tend to focus more on competencies than objectives (to a large extent with the support and interest of different stakeholders, most notably the OECD[2] with initiatives such as the DeSeCo project), they continue to obey a technological logic that conceives of teaching as the implementation of educational programs that are designed to ensure students reach an expected competency level.

Therefore, although referred to as competencies in curricular programs, as outlined in the technical model (Tyler, 2013), they are essentially measurable, observable objectives that need to be met. For example, in Spain, the nationwide law[3] that regulates the education system asks for "assessable learning standards", that is, defined indicators that have a high degree of specificity, as the results expected in each knowledge area at the end of each school stage.

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[1] This article presents the results of a doctoral thesis from the University of Malaga (Spain).

[2] The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) is an international cooperation agency, made up of 38 states, the objective of which is to coordinate economic and social policies to maximize economic growth and collaborate with the development of non-member countries. DeSeCo (Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations) aims to create a conceptual framework to inform the identification and assessment of key competencies, and help to define objectives for education systems.

[3] Act 8/2013, of 9th December, for the improvement of quality of education.

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However, as several authors (e.g., Contreras, 2002; Tenti, 2009) have pointed out, what has developed in the past few decades is not a change to competency-based education, but a shift from a Fordist model[4] to a post-Fordist model. Therefore, while school education has remained anchored in a technological paradigm that has predefined, sequenced, fragmented objectives, there is now greater flexibility in how these results are achieved. This is also apparent in the education reform laws in Italy,[5] which require that:

> The full implementation of the school's study program and the achievement of the curricular objectives mentioned in points 5 to 26 [of this law] […] respecting freedom of teaching, teacher collaboration and planning, interaction with families and the community, through the forms of flexibility and teaching and organizational autonomy provided for by the regulation referred to in the decree of the President of the Republic of 8th March 1999, n. 275.[6]

Therefore, the change from objective-based pedagogy to competency-based approaches appears to be no more than a change in the language rather than a change in the way the education system is structured or designed, as many countries are still organizing their education systems based on technological objective-based pedagogy (Gimeno, 2009).

Although these technical curricular systems, which still prevail in most European countries, are organized and structured with complex frameworks; when examined, they are hierarchical models in which the objectives are specified on the basis of those at the previous level (Blanco, 1994). Therefore, there are five curricular specification levels (Gimeno, 2009): the official curriculum decreed by the state; the adaptations and transformations at the local level; the school's educational program; the classroom schedule prepared by the teacher; and finally, the student experience in the classroom.

As this type of curricular system reduces the autonomy of the lower levels, the teaching practice is often predefined (Aoki, 2015; Schwab, 1969), with the agents on first level of this hierarchical structure establishing the objectives (sometimes referred to as *competencies*) that must be pursued. The curricular system and educational practice therefore, revolve around the expected results, leaving the student experiences and unique stories and needs in second place. In short, this technocratic curricular framework has made it difficult to embrace the newness (Arendt, 1996) that each child brings to the world.

Concerned by these developments, Connelly and Clandinin (1988) proposed a curriculum-making theory, in which the curriculum is experienced through situations and relationships and is narratively reconstructed through these experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992). The learning goes beyond the changing of behaviors, the acquiring of skills, or the accumulation of information as the curriculum is developed jointly by the students' and teachers' classroom experiences (Clandinin, 2013).

This approach is not, however, without regulations, which raises the question as to what should be regulated and how. It decentralizes the curricular design (Pinar & Irwin, 2004) and focuses more on the student learning experiences at school (Schwab, 1969). Therefore, a curricular model is needed that considers teachers as the protagonists of their own actions and allows the curriculum to be adapted to the characteristics and needs of each school, classroom, and student.

From this context, therefore, the following questions need to be answered: What relationships need to be built between the curricular programs and the classroom experience for the students and teachers? What is the nature of the curriculum being experienced by the students, what is the nature of the curricular program, and what are the tensions between the two? How should the relationships between the two be understood and built?

These research questions led to the focus of the present paper: to study the teachers and students involved in a curriculum-making process and their relationships with the curricular programs. In other words, the focus of this paper is on the meaning and purpose of the curricular programs and their relationships with the lived experiences of the teachers and students.

As the basis of this research was on narrative lived experiences (Clandinin & Husu, 2017; Contreras & Pérez de Lara, 2010; Davis & Murphy, 2016; Ricoeur, 1987, 1996), a narrative research framework was applied. Specifically, we worked with two teachers from Málaga (Spain) over two school years using observation and conversational interviews (Sierra & Blanco, 2017, Martín-Alonso, 2019) as the research procedures.

It was found that (1) the teaching profession moved between the two curricular worlds, (2) inherent educational practice tensions were generated, and (3) methods needed to be identified to harness these tensions fruitfully to avoid conflict.

2. Theoretical framework

To properly approach the focus of inquiry, the curriculum needed to be defined. In the most widespread definition, a curriculum is a set of objectives and related content that students are expected to know at the end of a certain school stage (Gimeno, 2015). However, what students experience in the classroom seldom matches these expectations and plans. For this reason, this research presumes two different ideas on what the curriculum is (Martín-Alonso, 2019).

Therefore, to properly analyze the curricular system and the student experiences, a distinction needs to be made between these two "curricular worlds", which in keeping with Aoki (1993, 2015; Magrini, 2015; Pinar & Irwin, 2004) are called the curricular program and the lived curriculum in this paper.

2.1. Curricular program

The polyphonic curricular program is made up of multiple voices with different intensities, that is, an official curriculum, the educational project at the specific school, the needs of the families, the guidelines and interests of the publishers, the administration rules, and other stakeholders (Gimeno, 1988). Therefore, the curricular program is symbolic (Stenhouse, 1987) of all the agents interested in providing teachers with a vision of what they believe should be included in the classroom instruction (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Olson, 2000). The curricular program is also a vision of the study program, that is, the objectives and knowledge that the students are expected to acquire by the end of a specific school period.

This concept has its origins in the work of Tyler (2013), who claimed that the curriculum was planned with specific objectives in mind to attain concrete behaviors. Curricular design, therefore, starts from objectives (or "competencies") and is effective when these objectives are achieved, which tends to suggest that any evaluation should be focused on determining the extent to which these objectives are met. In other words, the curriculum is a study program based on achieving concordance between the stated

[4] The Fordist educational model is inspired by Fordism, a serial industrial production system. Fordism is inspired by Taylor's work and develops from two main ideas: standardization and chain production.

[5] Act of 13th July 2015, n. 107.

[6] Author's translation.

curriculum objectives and the students' end results.

These beliefs appear to be those currently underpinning official documentation, which in addition to objectives, also give detailed definitions for the content and the evaluation criteria that the teacher must apply, which, therefore, significantly limits the educational practice and the teachers' decision-making powers (Gimeno, 2015).

Curricular programs set the objectives the teachers need to meet and give them the responsibility for promoting significant experiences for each student that lead them to the proposed objectives. This technical rationality, therefore, makes the objectives of the curriculum priority, with the means to achieve these objectives, that is, teaching, being subordinated to a task of lesser importance (Huber et al., 2011), which in turn means that the curricular program is not focused on the concrete, singular aspects of educational practice, the lived experience.

2.2. The lived curriculum and curriculum making

As experience precedes any type of learning, understanding education solely as an instrumental application limits student potential and autonomy, as these are only perceived as "objects" separate from the context and experience. To address the reality of the lived curriculum, Clandinin and Connelly (1992) suggested a curriculum making concept based on two main ideas: (1) Dewey's notion of experience (1997); and (2) a work mode centered on the uniqueness of educational practice inspired by Schwab's *Practical* (1969).

Dewey's (1997) concept of experience was focused on interactions in nature and people's transactions with their environments, under the belief that knowledge was intimately related to action because the characteristics and consequences of acts can only be discovered through activities that modify and reveal relationships with the environment. Therefore, from this perspective, learning is a process that requires interactions with a context and a complex system of predispositions that prepare for future actions (Biesta, 2014, 2017). This concept of experience can be used to establish a key area in the lived curriculum, namely that each person has a unique life story that they narratively build and reconstruct through their lived experiences.

Schwab (1969) also argued that a curriculum was not a representation or an abstract idea, stating that it was constructed based on real, concrete issues in which any differences were compared to other experiences and contexts. Schwab claimed that unlike pedagogical theory (which seeks to generate general, universal knowledge), the teaching profession is based on making choices and deciding on actions for each specific situation. Therefore, as teachers become further immersed in the contexts to try to overcome problems, they discover new realities and find that they need further information to make new decisions.

To choose the most appropriate option for each particular educational action based on the possible and unpredictable consequences of each action, Schwab attempted to re-conceptualize the relationships between theory and practice to conceive the curriculum as a lived experience that requires deliberation.

In a similar way, Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) idea of the curriculum as an experience placed classroom life, the teachers, and the students at the center of curricular research under the belief that the curriculum should mirror the way that students compose and give meaning to their lives (Clandinin et al., 2006) by creating and recreating their life stories (Huber et al., 2011) within the classroom experience (Dewey, 1997).

In contrast to the positivist paradigm, in which knowledge is abstracted from experience to allow for the development of generalizable principles, the curriculum as an experience presents a different way of understanding the relationship with the world and the construction of knowledge. As knowledge is built from experience, it is not separate from the individual; rather, the knowledge is embodied and constructed through a singular, subjective experience (Olson, 2000). In other words, each teacher and each student have unique life stories that are developed from their own experiences (Clandinin, 2013).

The lived curriculum has been theorized to be an alternative to the technical curriculum concept. The lived curriculum is seen as the singular experience lived by the teachers and the students and is a world in which the faces of each creature are present and irreplaceable (Martín-Alonso, 2019; Davis & Murphy, 2016). Therefore, as the curricular plan is an abstract proposal that takes shape based on the daily experiences in the classroom, it also deserves the "curriculum" label as much as a curricular plan.

However, the lived curriculum does not mean the abandonment of educational programs; rather, it is a scenario in which two curricular worlds need to be considered to meet the needs of both. Distinguishing a "different" curriculum for each creature requires the awareness of the concerns and ideas the students bring to the educational relationship. Therefore, if each person gives their own meaning to what happens and builds their own story based on their subjectivity, there are multiple related stories in the same classroom (Olson, 2000).

3. Methodology and method

3.1. Methodological and ontological framework

As the focus of this study is curriculum making based on the *Deweyan* narrative theory of experience, it is necessary to employ a narrative research framework. Therefore, given the nature of this study and our investigation tradition, this study takes a narrative research approach.

Of the diverse narrative research and narrative inquiry studies (Altan & Lane, 2018; Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Husu, 2017; Contreras, 2016; Contreras & Pérez de Lara, 2010; Orr & Olson, 2007), there has been a certain consensus that people shape their experiences through their own life stories of who they are, the people they meet, and the ways they interpret their past through these life stories. In other words, people use life stories to give meaning to their past, with these experiences being primarily constructed as narratives.

If life stories are perceived as the doors people go through to enter into relationships with their environment and make sense of it (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009), in the educational process, life stories are constructed and reconstructed, which makes the teachers and the students both storytellers and also characters in their own life stories and those of others (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Therefore, narrative research is not merely a methodological framework. More importantly, it has an epistemological and ontological framework; that is, in this study, the narration is both the method and the study focus.

As the ontological framework was based on Dewey's idea of experience and developed into a theoretical framework, experience was characterized as a continuous interaction between the person and their social and material environments (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009). Therefore, experience is transactional and involves knowledge; it is a person's representation of the world based on experiences that must be returned to for validation. Therefore, from a narrative perspective, it is possible to conclude that knowledge is constructed and contextualized in the continuum of a human life. As lives are constantly interacting with the environment, this

knowledge is continuously moving, evolving, and changing.

An important clarification here is that as with all qualitative research, narrative research is alien to positivist concerns that seek to generalize results to an entire population. Rather, narrative research seeks to create a framework within which the lived experience can be reinterpreted to create formative, educational experiences that help others interpret their own experiences (Altan & Lane, 2018). In this sense, by placing ourselves in narrative research, the task is not to talk and think about what people are like but rather to understand that each person has a story that is constantly being rewritten and that it is this incessant movement that we must try to capture (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004).

3.2. Research design and development

The research was designed and developed in two stages (Martín-Alonso, 2019): 1) the composition of field texts; and 2) the composition of research texts.

The composition of field texts refers to the composition of the teachers and students' oral and written texts about their school experiences that allowed them to stop and think about the curricular framework being constructed in the classroom (Contreras, 2017). These texts were either audio transcriptions of the conversations or field notes of the researchers' experiences with the teachers and students at the school. Some of these texts were shared with their authors to allow them to continue building from them. The composition of these texts therefore, was not to collect information, but rather to search for meaning from the lived experiences. Some studies have referred to (Clandinin, 2007; Clandinin & Husu, 2017) this "co-composition" of field texts to characterize narrative inquiry as a relational methodology.

This study used two specific research procedures: observation and conversational interviews (Sierra & Blanco, 2017, Martín-Alonso, 2019):

1) The observation carried out follows the proposal of "close observation" (Martín-Alonso, 2019). It involves immersing the researchers in a classroom in such a way that they are able to compose research texts that include: a) an analysis of the activities and the relationships being built; and b) a reflection on the researcher's own lived experiences with the students and teachers.
2) Conversational interviews search for the meaning of the experiences that have been lived in the school with the participants. These are called conversational interviews because they are spaces that seek to *interpret* the themes and lived experiences that are relevant to the research rather than following a predetermined question guide.

The fieldwork was carried out over two school years with two different teachers.

- School year 2016/17. Javier, a teacher at a secondary school in Málaga (Spain). In total 20 observation records, six interviews with the teacher and four interviews with the students were completed.
- School year 2017/18. Rosa, a school teacher at a school in Málaga (Spain). In total 18 observation records, 10 interviews with the teacher and 3 interviews with the students were completed.

The teachers were chosen using purposive sampling. Specifically, teachers with long years of professional experiences, pedagogical tact towards their students, and a reflexive teaching practice disposition were sought.

As this research was conducted with students and teachers, informed consent was given by all participants, who were informed of the nature of the research, its purpose and the freedom to withdraw at any time. The confidentiality of all data that could identify the participants in the research texts was guaranteed; therefore, in keeping with this promise, all personal data that could identify the people involved was changed in this article.

Once the field texts were drafted, the work moved into the second stage; the composition of research texts.

This analysis and writing process involved two parts at the same time. The first was the elaboration of the stories, either of the lived experiences in the classrooms or of the conversations with the teachers and students. In the second part of the analysis, the structural elements were identified to reveal the thematic aspects of the stories being composed to allow for the understanding of the study focus to move forward.

In short, as part of the narrative research framework, scenes associated with the lived experiences alongside the participants were constructed to allow for an analysis that could open up the areas related to the meaning, nature and relationships in the curricular program and the lived curriculum, that is, the focus was not to think *about* the life stories, but to think *with* the life stories (Morris, 2002). Therefore, in alignment with previous narrative researches (Martín-Alonso, 2019; Bolívar, 2002; Contreras, 2016, 2017; Contreras & Pérez de Lara, 2010; Skliar, 2011), the results are presented as a reflective dialogue between our analysis and the stories lived at school.

Although the results are supported by all the fieldwork and analyses conducted during the study and all stories elaborated from them, due to space constraints, only three scenes are presented in this paper.

4. Results and discussion

The results and discussion are divided into two sections. In the first section, the nature of the curricular tensions generated when the teachers entered into relationships with the stakeholders and the curricular plan are examined. Then, in the second section, these tensions are analyzed from a narrative perspective to reflect on how they can be fruitfully harnessed to dispel the conflicts.

4.1. Curricular tensions

As discussed in the theoretical framework, this study commenced from Aoki's (Pinar & Irwin, 2004) distinction between the two curricular worlds of the curricular program and the lived curriculum. The curricular program is what is traditionally known as the curriculum; that is, a program that outlines the students' expected learning that gives the indicators for the process and the assessment criteria for the achievement of such learning.

There are multiple agents influencing curricular designs, including both national and international institutions. For example, the OECD publishes regular missives that in many cases become political positions, such as those issued in relation to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) project (Gimeno, 2018).

At the local level, there are also specific people interested in directing the curricular design. For example, in the secondary school where the research was conducted, there were repeated encounters between the teachers and families, most of whom came to the school to share their concerns about the lack of textbooks as they were worried that their children may not have been covering the content.

Through their different actions, these agents become part of the symbolic object, which in this case is the curriculum. However, despite the educational theories, research, laws or training programs and the many people interested in participating in curricular

design and the actions in the classroom, learning does not happen by osmosis. As students learn from their classroom experiences and their relationships with the teacher (Atkinson, 2015; Biesta, 2017), after deliberation, they need to decide what to do in each situation, (Schwab, 1969).

Because the teacher is the only one who has a relationship with the students, they are the only ones that know what is needed and how the students will be accompanied through the process (beyond what appears in the study program). However, ignoring research and theories, the family situations, and the regulatory, legal framework would be negligent and could lead to misunderstandings.

Therefore, as the teacher's actions and deliberations must consider both the students' experiences and the issues that are brought into the classroom from outside, they experience a tension (Berry, 2007) between the two curricular worlds. Although these two worlds are focused on the same end, they are different in nature and can have contradictory or conflicting interests (Martín-Alonso, Blanco, & Sierra, 2018).

The following scene reveals these tensions and the way they are lived[7]:

> Rosa has a reading and writing backup class with Pedro, Laura and David (seven years old). We sit around a big table, so we can all see each other's faces. The teacher looks at the exercises they brought from class and observes how they have completed them. When she sees Laura's homework, she discovers that she has left almost everything blank and she realises that all students have difficulties differentiating between proper and common nouns, and tries to explain the difference to them:
>
> "Common nouns are the nouns we use to speak of things in general, while proper nouns refer to a specific thing. For example, if I say 'a child', do you know which child it is?"
>
> "No, it could be anyone," answers Peter.
>
> "Of course, it could be anyone," says Rosa, "but if I say 'David', do we know who it is?"
>
> "Yes!" the three of them answer in unison while pointing at the boy.
>
> They seem to have understood, so Rosa proposes an exercise: "Write down three common nouns, and three proper nouns." Both David and Peter are immersed in the task: they write things down, rub them out, think and write again. Laura, on the other hand, is absorbed. Her gaze is lost on the horizon through the window at the far end of the classroom. Rosa realizes this and asks her:
>
> "Who has been poorly in your family?"
>
> "My brother."
>
> "And is 'brother' a common noun or a proper noun?"
>
> "A common noun," Laura replies quickly.
>
> "Why?"
>
> "I don't know." It seems that Laura had answered randomly, and was right simply by chance.
>
> "How many brothers and sisters have you got?" asks Rosa, trying to help her think.
>
> "Three."
>
> "And if you tell me that your brother has been poorly, do I know who it is?"
>
> "No."
>
> "Then who's been poorly?" asks Rosa again.
>
> "Alberto," says Laura in a more cheerful tone, suggesting that she is beginning to understand.
>
> "And is Alberto a proper noun or a common noun?"
>
> "A proper noun," says Laura with enthusiasm and a big smile.
>
> "Why?"
>
> "Because you know which of my three brothers and sisters has been poorly."
>
> Laura takes her pencil and does the exercise enthusiastically; it seems that now she has understood. After focusing on completing several tasks with the help of her classmates, she becomes hesitant and her attention starts to drift towards other parts of the classroom. Rosa looks at the exercise she has stopped at and asks her:
>
> "Do you know what a plural noun is?"
>
> Laura looks down at the notebook. There's a silence. It looks like she's not going to answer the question. Rosa looks at me, seemingly wanting to vent her frustration: "Goodness me! Why do these kids have to learn such things? It makes me so angry." She turns her attention back to Laura, trying to help her.
>
> The hour-long class comes to an end shortly after. The children collect their materials and we accompany them to their classroom. Once we are alone, Rosa tells me:
>
> "It's perfectly normal that Laura was absent-minded and left the exercise book blank. It's normal because she's been at the hospital all week with her little brother … he was admitted to hospital after taking drugs."
>
> Laura is 7 years old, and what I had just heard did not make sense, so I asked her in surprise:
>
> "Her little brother?"
>
> "Yes," she replies, "at home her family take lots of different drugs. I don't know if it was by accident, or from breathing in second-hand smoke … but the fact is that the other day the social worker called us to tell us that the child was in the hospital and asked us if we knew anything."

The tension the teacher feels manifests itself when she asks: "Why do these children have to learn such things? It makes me so angry." It seems she doesn't agree with having to deal with this content when Laura is clearly thinking about other matters. It was understood that this question implied the following dilemma: Do I stick to the grammar content and textbook that the tutor expects Laura to master at the end of the week, or do I ignore it to address Laura's family situation? Formulated more generically, it would be, Should I follow the curricular program and refuse to acknowledge the child's unique situation or attend to her and disobey the social and normative mandate of the curricular program?

By dealing with scenes like this in this study, it was observed that conflicts did not arise because the situation presented different demands, but because of the way these differences were dealt with. The tension between the opposing "voices" is inherent in the educational profession because the very public

[7] The stories are composed from the field texts as composites. They are written in the first person because the fieldwork was done by Author 1, although all authors took part in writing them up.

and social nature of schools is always situated in institutional contexts that require regulation. Therefore, there are always different social agents and stakeholders (with differing degrees of legitimacy) interested in influencing the developments of such regulations. Further, at the heart of this complex web are the children, each of whom has their own singular and unpredictable needs.

Teachers experience these tensions in two ways: as a disagreement between the forces in conflict (specifically between the curricular program and the lived curriculum); or in more fruitful ways as an impulse that moves them to question and explore new ways of entering into the educational relationship (Blanco, Molina, & Arbiol, 2016; Berry, 2007). Therefore, as contradiction and ambivalence are inherent in the teaching profession, it is not a question of resolving or eliminating these situations; rather, it is a question of recognizing them and developing with them as pedagogical tension requires the capacity to question the direction to take (Contreras, 2016b).

With this in mind, to turn the tension experienced with Laura into something fruitful, it is necessary to reformulate the question, that is, instead of asking, "Why do these children have to learn such things?" another question that seeks a meeting point between the two curricular worlds needs to be asked, such as "What does this child have to learn?" This question, which alludes to experiencing the teaching profession fruitfully and its inherent tensions could be reformulated as "How can I be on the side of the children, attending to the needs I perceive and, at the same time, satisfy the social and common criteria of the school?"

When a curricular program is technically conceived, it reinforces the pre-viewed experience shows no interest in the uniqueness of the lived experience and treats the classroom as a process through which the pre-set objectives are achieved. Therefore, from this perspective, the tensions appear to be insurmountable, which causes Rosa to ask herself, "Why do these children have to learn this?" In contrast, when the curricular program is approached from the question *"What does this child have to learn?"* the educational experience is seen as a journey in which not everything is planned. Pedagogy that is not enslaved to generalizable, universal approaches can accept experiences that are unique and unanticipated. This question can therefore only be asked by a teacher in a classroom in relation to each child as the stakeholders do not know the children in each class in each school, so any attempt to respond is colored by ignorance and incomprehension.

Therefore, rather than seeing educational practice as a form of control (Contreras, 2002), tensions can only be fruitfully dispersed if the people involved in curricular design concentrate on supporting teachers to address the needs of each student and focus on the transformation of the self (Biesta, 2017), that is, by allowing everyone to experience the world.

Therefore, the essential question teachers and stakeholders need to ask if the action is to be guided in this direction is "How is the world experienced?" More precisely, they need to ask: what is the nature of the lived curriculum? how do students build the curriculum from their classroom experience? and what is the teacher's role in this process?

4.2. Curriculum making: between the private sphere and the public sphere

When secondary school students discussed their school experiences, they thought about them and talked about them in the same way: using narration. Supported by the literature review, it was concluded that experiences and the lived curriculum are narrative in nature. Therefore, it could be surmised that everyone constructs a life story that gives meaning to their experiences, with the narration constructing the meaning of the lived experiences.[8]

The human capacity to recount experiences personally and to others creates a symbolic meaning of what has been lived and makes people more aware of their own life stories (Cima et al., 2000). Experience narration involves a coherence with the life story and the identity of the characters including the "main character," the narrator themself, which means that the narrator's subjectivity is narratively constructed. The next scene elucidates this thinking.

> Students had to do a research paper on a topic of their choice. Today it is their turn to talk to a group that has been researching the videogame Minecraft. One of the points in the index Javier had prepared for them for the research was to explain where and how they had looked for the information.
>
> Nuria explains that all the information was obtained from the game itself and from the internet. She dwells on this point for a moment to share the terms used in the search engines.
>
> "The first thing we entered was 'Minecraft'," says Nuria.
>
> "And what did this return?" interjects Javier, "because if we enter general terms it will give us general terms; usually it is necessary to use more specific search terms."
>
> "Yes, that's what happened to us. At first we entered 'Minecraft', but the only results were for stores. That's why we decided to enter 'Minecraft college', but the results were just children playing. So, we tried 'Minecraft information' and that is what came out," replies Nuria, pointing to the web they are showing on the projector, which contains information about the game.

As Dewey (1997) pointed out, and as this scene shows, when people interact with their environments, they create meanings that guide them for future actions. To find what she was looking for, Nuria needed to try different approaches to access information until she found the right way. In the absence of a deeper conversation with the student, the next time she uses a search engine she will draw on this experience to find the right words.

Interaction and continuity are the two principles that make up experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Dewey, 1997), which has an important impact on the analysis of curricular tensions. If the experience is continuous, the life story is continuous, that is, it is necessary to listen to and understand the life stories of each individual student to help the person.

One day Rosa allowed us to live an experience that revealed through its symbolic power the importance of understanding the unique life stories of children that go beyond the school but give meaning to their school experiences.

> Fifth graders are doing multiplication, addition, and subtraction exercises with parentheses. When Cristina has finished her work, Rosa asks her to do one of the sums on the board. The girl takes the chalk and does the first exercise. She does the multiplication correctly, but places the decimal point incorrectly in all the results.
>
> "Why did you put the decimal point there?" asks Rosa.

[8] The narrative character of the experience is something that has been studied extensively (Aoki, 2015; Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Husu, 2017; Pinar & Reynolds, 2015; Ricoeur, 1987, 1996). That is why our aim was not to delve deeper into this area, but rather to observe and understand what happens when we place ourselves in this narrative perspective to look at the professional teaching landscape.

"Ah, it should be here! Is it okay here, Miss?" asks Cristina, while changing the decimal point.

The girl continues with another sum, and again places the decimal point in the wrong place.

"Please explain why you put it there," intervenes Rosa again.

Hesitantly, Cristina tries to explain the procedure. She is not clear about the process she followed, but the reasoning seems to be enough for Rosa to understand her.

"Oh, now I know what's wrong: at home they explain it to you one way, and at school another. Sure, you do it that way in class," says Rosa while she does a subtraction, "and at home you do it this way, don't you?" concludes the teacher while doing the same subtraction using another method.

"Yes."

"The important thing is not to confuse the two. The two forms are fine, but you have to do it one way or the other, not mix them together."

"Of course! So I can do the subtraction, and what I carry over I should add here."

"That way's fine, or the other way. Which do you prefer?"

"It's easier this way."

"Well then, do it always like this, without mixing them."

Rosa realized that Cristina didn't do the subtraction properly because of something that was happening outside the school, that is, she was being taught differently at home. Only when Rosa understood this was Cristina able to master the decimal sums. This scene reveals how Rosa approached Laura's whole life story in her continuous attempt to know the family situation and how this was affecting her school experiences, with, for example, grammar exercises.

The adults in the school have a responsibility to accompany and prepare the children for their "public existence" so they can create and accomplish something new (Arendt, 1996). Several authors (Huber et al., 2016; Murphy et al., 2012) have talked about two curriculum making worlds: the world of familial curriculum making (linked to the private sphere, following Arendt's conceptualization), and the world of school curriculum making (linked to the public sphere). This was clearly seen in the scene with Cristina, who found herself between what she brought to the classroom (her family relationship at home and, in short, her life story) and the common space that was opening up at school, which is why the tensions between the two curricular worlds are often seen to be irresolvable, as they involve a coming together of two different worlds with cultural narratives that do not always coincide.

So what? Why is this analysis of curricular tensions relevant to teaching practice? As discussed, by knowing the nature of the curricular tensions, it is possible to use them fruitfully because the origins of these tensions are generated because of the difference perspectives on the curricular program and the lived curriculum. Curriculum program frameworks are generally designed by people who are often situated far from the recipients of those program, whereas the lived curriculum is focused on the uniqueness of each relationship and educational experience. This distance between these two worlds can lead to situations in which each "curricular world" demands opposite actions.

As these tensions are part of the complex school system, it is necessary to find a way to view them fruitfully to create something new (Contreras, 2016b). Consequently, this study revealed a need to determine a meeting point for the curricular program and the lived curriculum by searching for constructive relationships and support networks oriented towards the child's life story. Ultimately, for teachers it is about being on the side of the children without being against their sense of professionalism.

5. Conclusion

Inspired by Clandinin and Connelly (1995), it could be concluded that the origins of the tensions existing in the professional teaching landscape are epistemological, that is, these tensions are the result of frictions between the perspectives on how the teaching profession should be planned and developed.

Education stakeholders, who are generally far from the recipients of the education, manage educational programs using abstract, prescriptive, impersonal, timeless, generic language, which requires teachers to situate themselves within a framework of prescriptive program, objectives, and results measurement. However, this framework is significantly different from the teaching in the classroom, which is based on a contextual, unpredictable, personal, temporal and concrete educational relationship (Piussi & Mañeru, 2006).

Although these two curricular worlds are in tension, they are not mutually exclusive. First, if the curricular program were the only focus, the education would revolve around objectives or what can be measured (Biesta, 2009), that is, only what could be measured would be valued and the lived experience would be ignored. However, if only the students' experiences were focused on, the theories, research and enriching contributions to the teaching profession would be ignored, as well as the rules and regulations associated with the school's social and political contexts.

In short, with differing degrees of uniformity and sameness, a curricular program aims to know and establish what the child needs to enter the world. However, if the educational relationship begins by recognizing the uniqueness of the child, the curricular program would be unprepared as it does not encompass what is yet to come (Rivera, 2012). Therefore, the curricular program and the lived curriculum are not a struggle between the "same" and the "new," but are seeking to find a space in which the "new" can be created from the "same".

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