

Conceiving Teaching And Learning Processes: Fostering Curricular Contextualization Practices



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Project presentation

Putting knowledge in context towards the improvement of students achievement is a research project concerning the issue of Curricular Contextualization, based on the idea that curricular contextualization is a crucial condition for students effective and significant learning, promoting their school success.

Developed by:

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Basic premisses

- Education as a process seeking the individuals' educational, social and personal development and growth, involving different kinds of meaningful knowledge and taking into account the individual in all its complexity (Carr, 2007).
- The demands and challenges addressed to school education require rethinking guidelines and practices, in order to improve teaching and learning processes and promote the better educational environment possible.
- The academic and political discourses state the need to find new and improved teaching and learning and curriculum development practices in order to fulfill the ideal of education for all (UNESCO, 1990).
- The concept of *Curricular Contextualization* (CC), as a pedagogical-didactical process able to establish connections between disciplinary contents and the real life situations experienced by students, their characteristics as individuals and the culture and habits of a particular social context, aiming to promote students' success and knowledge and acquisition of skills.

Project goals

➤ Main goal:

- To produce knowledge about processes of curriculum development and management, focusing Curricular Contextualization, and its relation with students' achievement and school results

➤ Specific goals:

- To deepen and to map the theoretical perspectives coming from political sciences, epistemology, sociology and curriculum studies that frame contextualization of knowledge;
- To cross those perspectives in order to increase knowledge and produce a theoretical model intended to reduce scholar failure;
- To produce knowledge about curriculum policies, national and international, where takes place curriculum contextualization principle;
- To produce knowledge about organizational processes and curriculum development at basic and secondary education that focuses on curricular contextualization;
- To evaluate curriculum contextualization effects on educational equity.

Methodological approach

The methodological approach concerned two phases: a conceptual one and an empirical phase

Conceptual/
Political
(finished)

- Research and study of meanings attributed to CC, both theoretically (literature review); and politically (policies and programs analysis), concerning national or international publications between 2001 and 2010.

Empirical
(in development)

- Case studies with secondary education teachers and schools specifically chosen to meet the project intentions, focusing 5 key disciplines: Mother Language (Portuguese), History, Mathematics, Biology and Geology, and Physics and Chemistry

Methodological approach – conceptual/political phase

Literature review

Search and selection of articles related to the research focus, in specific journals dedicated to education and curriculum in Portugal, Spain, France, Brazil, etc., and in databases containing worldwide publications

Content analysis and data organization

Policies and programs analysis

Selection of key Portuguese documents concerning education and curriculum, and search for relevant European Union orientations and recommendations

Content analysis and data organization

Theoretical framework

The **concept of curricular contextualization** is still in development and not yet solidly defined. Even though, there are some understandings present in educational discourses and theories, framing and defining this concept

- **Curricular contextualization definitions** are rare but consistent with each other;
- **Traces of curricular contextualization** can be found in concepts such as: place-based education; personalized learning, etc.
- **Curricular contextualization** did not arise from thin air, it has in its basis concepts and theories already established in the education field.
- **Curricular contextualization** has **gradually established** itself among professionals and discourses, constituting a new – or renewed – approach for teaching and learning, in an attempt to answer to educational demands

Theoretical framework

➤ The literature presents, as main features of curricular contextualization, establishing parallels and connections between curricular/school knowledge and real-life situations, interesting and meaningful for students, promoting a better understanding of relevant topics.

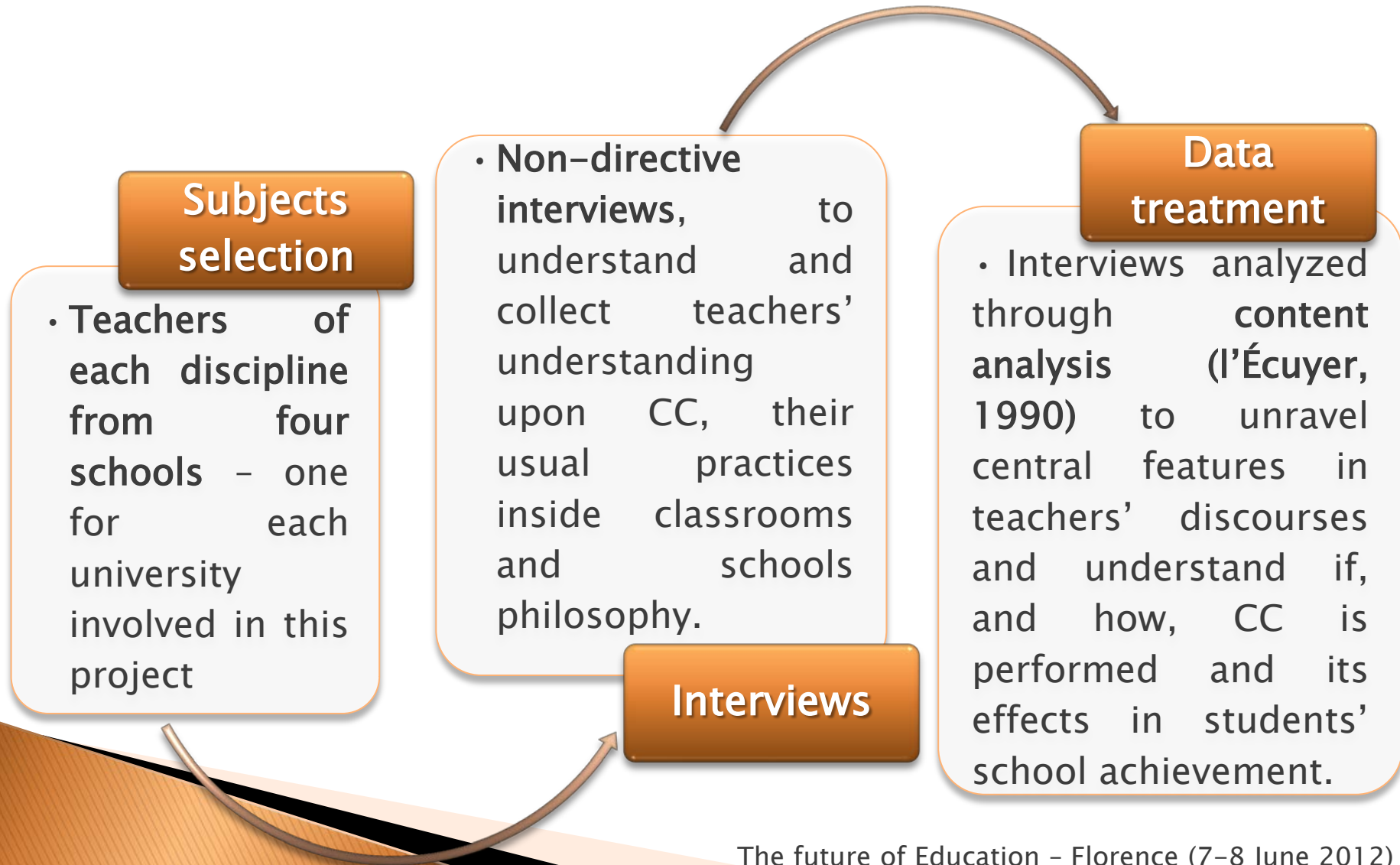
➤ Literature shows that curricular contextualization features are mixed within other concepts, allowing to conclude that CC has many focus, namely:

- **The student** (answering to student's interests, learning rhythms and styles, difficulties, etc.);
- **Place** (taking cultural features, life habits, local community knowledge into account);
- **Pedagogical practices** (recurring to different knowledge and skills);
- **Diversity** (developing learning environments that provide conditions for expressing diversity);
- **Disciplinary contents** (developing interdisciplinary relations)

Theoretical framework

- Literature shows that many authors recognize and defend curricular contextualization – or features of CC isolated from the concept – as key concepts and promising set of strategies in promoting successful teaching and learning process and environments (Yamauchi (2003); Gillespie (2002); Kalchick & Oertle (2010); King *et al* (2007)).
- Many authors stress the need to think and conceptualize the curriculum around individuals, places and cultures, in order for it to be more interesting and more meaningful for learners.
- Several authors and educational researchers consider and present evidences that show that CC – or CC features – improve traditional teaching and learning environments.

Methodological approach - empirical phase



Findings – *What is curricular contextualization?*

Teachers' discourses revealed a more common unawareness concerning curricular contextualization than the knowledge or conscious understanding on the subject.

➤ Some teachers showed an awareness of this concept:

- *“It’s what I said before, is to not disconnect [knowledge] from their [the students] reality” (History teacher)*
- *“In other words, how can we adapt the curriculum as a whole, to the context, aiming for better results and better practice” (Portuguese teacher)*

➤ Some revealed unawareness:

- *Curricular contextualization? What do I understand as curricular contextualization? Such a complicated question...” (Math’s teacher)*
- *Honestly I don’t (...) I’m really not understanding what you are asking” (Physics and Chemistry teacher)*
- *When I heard it I thought (...) I don’t know how to answer...” (Department coordinator)*

Findings – *Why and how to use CC?*

Even though CC is an unknown concept, teacher's discourses clearly show that they perform curricular contextualization in their daily practices, driven by the belief that this is the better approach to promote students' success and creating good teaching and learning environments

- *"I planned the class but students are not following it (...) I have to be able do the adaptation to students (...) And there is also the usefulness in everyday life (...) Is trying to use Math's to solve a day-to-day problem"* (Math's teacher)
- *"We can give a History lesson in an old-fashioned way (...) or give it based on what is important to them [students] (...) I believe that History only makes sense when connected to the present"* (History teacher)
- *"[CC provides] equity. On the other hand, I believe it makes learning meaningful"* (Department coordinator)
- *"I believe this experience helps us to really reach these [success and school achievement] goals and work with the students fruitfully"* (Math's teacher)

Conclusions

- **Curricular Contextualization is mainly unknown as a concept to teachers but is an actual part of their daily practices:** even when teachers use CC in their everyday classroom practices, they are feel unfamiliar with the concept and, at first sight, perceive it as new and unknown.
- **This (re)new(ed) curriculum approach is due to students' motivation improvement and is the most fruitful strategy to achieve better school marks:** rather than encouraged by teaching the subjects' contents, teachers improve strategies and methods aiming to develop a meaningful curriculum.
- **This approach is related to students' school marks:** even with overall lack of time for developing new and better teaching in learning practices, teachers find the time spent with this methods successful and feel it is worth.
- **This practice is also encouraged by students' participation in class:** even if unconsciously, students promote CC practices due to their natural curiosity and interest in all subject matters. This curiosity lead students to ask questions on subjects related with curriculum and daily experiences.

Conclusions

- **Teachers perform curricular contextualization in their daily practices**, driven by the belief that this is the better approach to promote students' success and creating good teaching and learning environments
- **The interviews shown that CC is, in fact, an innovative practice:** teachers are currently unraveling its meaning.
- **It is also an “ancient” process** constituted by a set of already in use practices among teachers that are now rediscovered and reconceptualized as CC practices.

In sum, we defend that Curricular contextualization is a *raw diamond* for teaching and learning.