

# EDUCATION DURING COVID FROM THOMAS POPKEWITZ'S SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY

## La educación en tiempos del COVID desde la epistemología social de Thomas Popkewitz

MARLON ALEXIS OVIEDO OVIEDO\*

Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar Sede Ecuador, Quito, Ecuador

[alexis.oviedo@uasb.edu.ec](mailto:alexis.oviedo@uasb.edu.ec)

Orcid Number: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8142-976X>

### Abstract

This article uses social epistemology to interpret Ecuadorian educational activity during the COVID-19. Through this theory / methodology developed by the American academic Thomas Popkewitz, it is sought to understand the educational moment of Ecuadorian education inscribed in the dynamics imposed by the pandemic. The article studies the ways taken by different educational concepts, how they become more acute, more visible, how they lose their subtlety, or how these are confirmed. Two objectives are achieved. On the one hand, to present social epistemology as an interpretative research perspective, not so widespread in our environment. On the other, to study the health event and its influence on education from the theoretical orientations of social epistemology, contrasting its concepts with problem manifestations of education under COVID19. It also interprets information from teachers, authorities and communicators. The changes occurred in schooling, curriculum and pedagogical discourse since the emergence of the pandemic are revealed. They are reflected on the changes occurred when moving from face-to-face education to virtual education and those due to the introduction of new practices, their interrelation with existing structures and their rules. The influences of educational psychology in schooling, curricular organization and pedagogical discourse are also presented. Its links to academic discipline, curriculum and evaluation and its role for achieving the successful adjustment of the individual with his environment.

### Keywords

Social epistemology, education, schooling, curriculum, pedagogical discourse, pandemic.

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\* Has a Degree in Economy from Universidad Central del Ecuador. Has a Master in Culture and Development Studies, and has a PhD in Education Sciences from Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium). Areas of interest: Social pedagogy, curriculum, culture studies, intercultural and comparative education, research methods, organizational behavior, political sciences. He has published several books and articles on these topics. Lecturer in the Education Area of Universidad Simón Andina and is the coordinator of the Master Program in Educative Policies of the same university.

### Resumen

Este artículo interpreta, desde la epistemología social, la actividad educativa ecuatoriana durante la COVID-19. Desde esta teoría/metodología desarrollada por el académico estadounidense Thomas Popkewitz se busca comprender el momento educativo de la educación ecuatoriana, inscrita en la dinámica impuesta por la pandemia. Se estudia cómo se agudizan, se hacen más visibles o pierden su sutileza diversos conceptos educativos, o de qué manera estos se confirman. Se logra, por un lado, presentar la epistemología social como perspectiva interpretativa de investigación, no tan difundida en nuestro medio. Por otro, estudiar desde sus orientaciones teóricas la influencia del evento sanitario en la educación, contrastando conceptos con manifestaciones problemáticas de la educación en pandemia e interpretando la información vertida por docentes, autoridades y comunicadores en medios de comunicación. Se develan los cambios ocurridos en la escolarización, el currículo y el discurso pedagógico al surgir la pandemia. Se reflexiona sobre las alteraciones acaecidas en esos conceptos al mudar de la educación presencial a la educación virtual, así como frente a la introducción de nuevas prácticas y la interrelación de estas con las estructuras existentes y sus reglas. Se presenta la influencia de la psicología educativa en la escolarización, la organización curricular y el discurso pedagógico vinculados a la disciplina, al currículo, la evaluación y encargada de lograr el ajuste exitoso del individuo con su medioambiente.

### Palabras clave

Epistemología social, educación, escolarización, currículo, discurso pedagógico, pandemia.

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## Introduction

This article interprets from social epistemology the educational activity during the pandemic by COVID-19. Based on this theory/methodology developed by the American academic Thomas Popkewitz, it is sought to understand the educational moment of Ecuadorian education, framed in the dynamics imposed by the pandemic, studying in what way different educational concepts become more acute, more visible and when they lose their subtlety.

Two objectives are achieved. On the one hand, to present social epistemology as an interpretative perspective of research, not so widespread in this environment. On the other hand, to study from the theoretical orientations of this theory/methodology the pandemic and its influence on education, contrasting concepts with problem related to pandemic education. The changes that have occurred in schooling, curriculum and pedagogical discourse since the emergence of the pandemic are presented. It reflects the changes that occur when moving from face-to-face education to virtual education, as a result of the introduction of new practices, their interrelation and the existing structures and their rules.

The influence of educational psychology, schooling, curricular organization and pedagogical discourse, linked to curriculum, academic discipline and evaluation, is also reviewed in order to achieve the successful adjustment of the individual with the environment.

Coronavirus has affected all human activity, and education has not been the exception. Few analyzes and interpretations have been made on Ecuadorian education during COVID-19, from positivism, to discourse linked to production, to sociocritic positions. There are some aspects that have changed in education since the pandemic started. One of them is the sense and practice of education itself, since it moved from face-to-face to virtuality. However, the educational process coped by virtuality goes far beyond coordinating a session in Zoom or any application. It is much more than seeing how students magically appear on the screen to receive the course or the thesis defense. That reality is rather a privilege.

This process is not met by several factors typical of this time, as well as by structural aspects of education present even before the pandemic. Two questions would be answered in this paper. On the one hand, what is social epistemology? And what is its main conceptual basis for interpreting the educational phenomenon? How does social epistemology interpret the changes that have occurred in Ecuadorian education since covid-19 pandemic?

A theoretical research has been carried out from various works developed by Thomas Popkewitz to conduct this article, essentially those that initiate and consolidate his proposal. In addition, information from professors, authorities and communicators of the media is interpreted, and other theoretical and documentary sources are studied that provide data to look at COVID-19 in Ecuadorian education.

The present paper is structured in four sections, the first section deals with the context of Ecuadorian education when COVID-19 appears; the second section presents social epistemology as a theory/methodology of research; the third section interprets from social epistemology the educational phenomenon at the time of COVID-19; in the fourth part the opportunities that this event would provide in Ecuadorian education are looked at and, finally, the conclusions are shown.

## The Context of Ecuadorian Education when COVID-19 Appears in Ecuador

The pandemic, as Samuel Guerra emphasizes, illustrate the vulnerability of life established by coloniality in Latin America, a new vulnerability that enlists the region within a sense of universality and not merely as a backyard of the metropolis (Guerra, 2021). COVID-19 also floated the

asymmetries and inequities inherent in the capitalist system by acting in a country called a third world.

Since March 16, 2020, these asymmetries, in the dominant educational modality, have been observed, first of all, in connectivity. According to a newspaper article from El Universo (2019), in 2019, the official speech showed that 79% of Ecuadorians had access to the Internet, particularly from mobile devices. The official spokesmen, in the public newspaper El Telégrafo (2019), for their part, said that the State would develop programs for rural people to access satellite connections at \$9 a month.

When the coronavirus arrived, the figures were different, so as of March 20, 2020, only 37% of households have access to the Internet and only 9.1% of those living in rural areas (INEC, 2019). As Volhonen (2020) points out in his “Recommendations for Education in Times of Emergency”, out of 37%, only 24% of Ecuadorians have a computer at home and only 8% in the rural areas. The new way of learning did not begin well, even more so when “(...) the ministry always points to educational innovation through the entry of new objects, (...) electronic whiteboards, computers, tablets, perhaps androids in the future, in disregard of the main element of learning: The educational link” (Miranda & Grijalva, 2020, p. 203). The statistical data presented in the government’s political discourse contradicted the real conditions that the country had to face the emergency. This situation exacerbated because, in the pandemic context, the education was the most affected area.

In the virtual education, academic work is hampered by the loss of Internet connection, especially if the provider is the state telecommunications company (CNT). The professor had not thought about it before, nor did he guess that he would have to use his own equipment and resources to teach, as Abad (2020) reflects in his article “Education in the Society of Fatigue”.

The aim is to understand the educational dynamics in this new reality, from the social epistemology. To this end, this theoretical orientation and therefore some of its educational concepts are studied.

## Social epistemology, theory for educational research

The organizer of social epistemology is Thomas Popkewitz, former president of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, who has dedicated his academic career to studying various phenomena such as educational reform, curriculum, schooling,



among others (University of Wisconsin at Madison, n. d.). Social epistemology, from its most general aspects, has its origins in Durkheim's sociological thought and in the importance provided to the social, the collective and the historical in the formation of communities, as well as having considered that the interpretations made by people of the world correspond to an infinite variety of thoughts and conditions (Popkewitz, 1991).

Another foundation of social epistemology corresponds to philosophical traditions, basically the tradition of French thought, of the theoretical developments of the School of Annals and the *archeologie du savoir* (archeology of knowledge) of Foucault. The Annals School is a historiographic current that began in the late 1920s (1929), and has been influential in the development of social science and historical currents in the 20th century. The size of the Annals School and the journal are so relevant that, according to Barros (1991), "if history has overcome the function of relating the battles and the events of the "great men", it is due to the Annals School, and to historical materialism" (p. 193). The historical tradition of the Annals considers change as a social break in traditional models, rather than looking at it as an evolution or a chronology of events. It looks at history as thought models that interweave with long-term changes in production and reproduction patterns.

The *archeology of knowledge* developed by Michel Foucault is considered by many to be a method for analyzing discursive formations or groups of linguistic systems, which give rise to the thought of the determined historical period in which these were developed; even if the language itself is a timeless basic structure, typical of all discursive formations. Thus, discursive formations influence subjects, while organizing a system of conceptual possibilities that determine thinking in a given place and period. According to Gary Gutting (1994), in the *Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault tries to build a general approach to the history of thought that does not presuppose the centrality of the phenomenological subject. Foucault, from history, explores the structural relationships that are part of social life and at the same time of the individual's particular conceptions, guiding him to self-regulation. However, it is from the *Archeology of Knowledge* that Michel Foucault (1969, 1991) says what the processes of subjectivation and objectification are, which allow the subject to be an object of knowledge. Even if he does not consider himself, "neither historian of science, nor of ideas" (Burgelin, 1967, p. 845).

The *archeology of knowledge* shares several ideas with the Annals tradition, including the visualization of changes as ruptures. They differ in the *locus* of their research, since in the work of the philosopher the



dimension of this visualization is regional, focused on particular spaces such as prisons, shelters or nursing houses and that of historiographers, in turn, is global and intercontinental (Popkewitz, 1991). Some premises that come from both the Annals and from the Foucauldian reconstruction are important for the understanding of social epistemology applied to the education worked by Popkewitz,

On the one hand, the thesis of Michel Foucault quoted by Burge-  
lin (1967) in his article *L' archeologie du savoir* is crucial for understand-  
ing the social epistemology: "In a culture and at a given time, there is  
only one episteme, which defines the conditions for the possibility of all  
knowledge" (p. 854). Likewise, from the tradition of the Annals, espe-  
cially the so-called third parties, the "approach of history from the sub-  
ject, overcoming the deterministic vulgate" is also worked, (Barros Gui-  
meráns, 1995, p. 79), an approach that increases over the historians and  
social scientists of the time.

In the approach of social epistemology applied to research in edu-  
cation, both contributions can be seen more precisely. On the one hand,  
the inclusion of the 'power' category in the socio-historical analysis allows  
to unravel conceptions of progress that have been maintained as func-  
tions of contemporary schooling. For its part, the approach developed  
by the Annals allows to enter into a form of thought about the historical  
phenomena of schooling, seen as a set of epistemologies that intersect  
under certain material conditions (Popkewitz, 1991).

To be sure, from a historical perspective, it is important to unravel  
social and educational phenomena, but this is not enough if other con-  
ceptualizations related to knowledge and which go beyond the interests of  
its 'interests', as stated by Habermas in 1970, are not taken into account.  
It is changing social conditions and institutional character that determine  
epistemological debates. One factor that cannot be absent is the conception  
of power and the disciplinary struggles (Popkewitz, 1997), which refers to  
the Foucauldian perspective and the studies of micro and macro models of  
government developed by the author of the *archeology of knowledge*, who  
provide a way of introducing the notion of the State into schooling, from  
the particular interest in social models operating in institutions.

This work also allows to consider school pedagogy from a histori-  
cal perspective of change in epistemological terms. This historical per-  
spective linked to an episteme that defines the possibilities of knowledge  
also allows to interpret educational and pedagogical phenomena such as  
the school massification, a proposal nuanced in different eras; the styles  
of pedagogy, basically those developed in the nineteenth century; and



even the proposals for educational reform and curricular reformulations that occurred in the twentieth century (Popkewitz, 1991).

From these theoretical foundations, it is possible to speak of social epistemology as a method for studying reasoning systems as social practices (Popkewitz, 1997) that “allow understanding how distinctions or differences in schooling build a normative whose effects are governing systems of inclusion and exclusion” (Popkewitz, 1997a, p. 134) in educational policy, research in education, pedagogy and teacher training (Popkewitz, 1991, 1997, 1997a), and at the same time, from the relationships between knowledge and power. It is a theoretical potential for the interpretation of historical and sociological changes in education, forming contemporary schooling practices (Popkewitz, 1991).

Social epistemology takes up constituted objects, such as knowledge linked to schooling and defines them as elements of institutional practice, historically formed from patterns of power relations, which provide structure and coherence to the daily life events (Popkewitz, 1991). For example, if such changing concepts such as reform, professionalization or the Education Sciences are seen as components of a context that encompasses them, these acquire a meaning within a context of relationships that are combined (Popkewitz, 1991). It is a study of educational phenomena, immersed in a knowledge-power relationship, and the ways in which the former interweaves with the institutional worlds to produce power relations. This understanding of the exercise in the education system and the school institution contributes to the visibility of inequities that may appear even in a subtle or standardized way. It is therefore an important contribution to building more democratic societies and schools (Popkewitz, 1997).

## The interpretation of education from social epistemology during COVID-19

The change in the educational dynamics produced by COVID-19 is interpreted in this work from social epistemology as theoretical construction. To this end, theoretical orientations will be developed in different educational concepts, defined by social epistemology with educational phenomena of these days, from manifestations that emerged in the new pandemic reality. Reality from these concepts is observed in its distortions, within its limits and it even cracks not as subtle forms of exercise of power but in all its verticality. Looking at all the concepts that study

the various problem manifestations of this “new reality,” they definitely transcend an academic article. This research focuses on three crucial concepts, both in social epistemology, as well as in the study of education and the school institution and its role in *technologies*.

### *Schooling*

Popkewitz (1997) defines schooling as the strategies and technologies that drive students' reasoning about the world and about themselves enrolled in this world. The languages of schooling, he says, are not just words, but rules and standards where discourses are social practices (Popkewitz, 1997a). In this sense, according to Rose (in Popkewitz, 1997b):

(...) the idea of the school was to act as a moral technology, not merely teaching obedience, but seeking to form the personality of the child from the emulation of the teacher's personality (with) pastoral techniques to encourage self-knowledge, to extend the sense of sympathetic identification through the establishment of links between virtue, honesty, self-empowerment and purified pleasure (p. 6).

Certainly, during pandemic, the instructions given to students about how to reason about the world and how they were inserted into it, without losing their reproductive essence, ceased to present themselves as they have been now. Reality, media information, family experiences, and school discourse allow students visualize themselves from their fragility and insecurity, contradicting positivist thinking from the official agenda. The fact that they are unable to attend school change the rules, disciplinary rules, codes of communication and rituals, and face-to-face classes weakened as the educational process developed in virtuality. In this new modality, it is not possible to exercise a strict control or to discipline online twenty students, for example, who listen their class without sharing the same space.

The social patterns of schooling are not neutral, but they correspond to the great social and cultural differences of societies (Popkewitz, 1988) and this is evident during pandemic. Abruptly, coronavirus divided societies into one where students could continue their classes, and on the other, those who did not have that opportunity. In one reality, people at home with cell phones, high-speed internet and computers for all members to work or study virtually. On the other, rural students and their parents, walking for hours looking for connection to be able to listen to class, or who do not have Internet service. A Guano teacher says: “My students do not have access to the Internet frequently. At most... they pay



\$3 to have internet on their phone... they do not have money or parents are the ones who have cell phones, but old ones” (Karen Lopez in *El Universo*, 2020). Thus, inequity in access is compounded by additional costs that further undermine the impoverished economy. Costs in education that should be solved by the State, from the conception of free education.

Another testimony, collected by the Spanish newspaper *El País* (2020) is even more dramatic:

Anita Gualichico, a mother of three students had to buy a smartphone (...) to download the applications that teachers asked for. It was \$300 that she managed to pay in installments (and) plus one or two dollars for daily recharges.

The change in educational modality did not have a fast response from the State to address it accurately. Anita’s testimony predates the educational platform implemented, as she mentions applications requested by teachers and from their initiative.

The minimal connectivity, that defective connectivity that before coronavirus did not allow to run a film, and which, during confinement, with two parents working virtually and with the students in classes, produces interruptions to all. Because, the use of technology, besides being determined by the view of the person who uses it and assesses it (Aguilar, 2011); as Popkewitz emphasizes (1997): shows that “there is a continuous interaction between the social world in which schooling is a part and the dynamics and priorities of schooling conditions” (p. 230) and this interaction between schooling and the social world shows the exclusion of vast sectors when the gear of the system is minimally changed. According to *El Universo* (2020c), the Minister of Telecommunications (Andrés Michelena said that (...) there are three million of students in school and tax schools enrolled in 150 000 schools, of which two million (use) educational platforms and have connection; but one million of students (do not) have a computer or telephone; (...) neither internet at home, nor on their mobile phones.

COVID-19 revealed that Ecuadorian schools do not meet the minimum conditions to develop their education online:

The instruction provided by the Ministry of Education to teachers was to use a platform called TEAM, but there was no prior training. Susana Ponce, 39, a teacher at a public school in Tulcán... did like many teachers: create WhatsApp groups to communicate with parents and send them homework (*El País*, 2020).

In the face of official ineffectiveness, the individual initiative arises which is linked to mysticism in the fulfillment of duty. COVID-19 exposed those weaknesses of the educational system: the control exercised over teachers and their work activity from supervision and local authorities, which was before subtly regulated from visits and communications and that, since the beginning of COVID-19, materialized in strict mechanisms for the teacher to prove that, even from his home, he is working (Oviedo, 2020).

(...) the ministry forces us to enter the platform as assistance and we must send tasks and activities, but I have no content. I have reported this to the school authorities. (...) But the platform is so slow that just by entering to see the activities the students run out of mega (Karen López in *El Universo*, 2020).

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On May 4, 2020, the Costa regime's primary and secondary schools began the school year online, and yet many parents in that region have decided not to enroll their children, both because they do not rely on the new virtual modality, or they lack of resources given economic depression or because they consider that with YouTube tutorials, they could teach their children, i.e., a sort of homeschooling (Oviedo, 2020a). In fact, these rituals and ceremonies of schooling that create a homogeneity illusion were revealed during pandemic. Not only from social differences, but also "social transactions in school that represent differences between what is taught and learned" (Popkewitz 1988, p. 26). A curricular proposal is taught, but it is learned by those who can access to it

The pandemic also highlighted the different forms of schooling, designed according to who the educational proposal is aimed at. Faced with the face-to-face impossibility and the crisis of virtual education in most sectors of the country, the Ministry of Education organized educational days on radio and television:

From March 23, the transmission for radio and television would be from 30 minutes to an hour (...) In the Sierra and Amazonia regime there are approximately two million students. 73.5% correspond to public schools (El Universo, 2020b).

A measure that has also become ineffective by showing that only 8% of rural households have access to these means (Volhonen, 2020). Once again, teachers are providing solutions, teacher Claudia Tobar proposes to search for other effective communication channels: "Perhaps a phone call from the teacher to the father and ask him to talk to all par-

ents to keep them up with what the boys should do” (Claudia Tobar in *El Universo*, 2020). In all situations, teachers are the ones who use their resources for developing their work.

Activities for student were proposed and parents were encouraged to support this modality, despite the fact that, as stated by the USFQ career director of Education: “Traditional education will not work, thousands of repetitive activities can be asked to do, but that will not allow us to achieve the cognitive complexity objectives we would like to achieve. We must try to give them more real and practical tasks” (Nascira Ramia in *El Universo*, 2020). On the one hand, the system allows that the learning is exclusively focused in the text, with its informative content, supporting the activities carried out, without reflecting on the discussion, the debate between the disciples or the research enrichment that invites new developments presented by the professor. On the other hand, a structural problem is not taken into account: there are areas where there is not Internet or radio, with lot of people who do not read on a daily basis. In many cases, the parents who are responsible of their children’s educational process are functionally illiterate.

It was observed that the schools also organize their spaces in a particular way, whether they belong to an ethnic minority or a poor group (Popkewitz, 1997) and also different forms of schooling emphasize different ways of considering ideas, an emphasis that depends on the group of students, whether they are poor or rich, urban or rural, and thus to what extent different social values are looked at and different forms of legitimization and forms of social control (Popkewitz, 1988). Thus, there are different forms of teaching and knowledge is emphasized from the place the student has in society and the usefulness that is believed to be given in accordance with the social class to which he belongs. From these assessments, Popkewitz (1997a) concludes that systems of reasoning are seen as effects of power, which refers to looking at another concept and its manifestations during pandemic.

### *The curriculum*

The curriculum is definitely one of the most important concepts of education and the educational institution. There are different conceptualizations of the curriculum which are viewed from different perspectives. This concept can be seen from a technical nature or from its socio-historical approach, and is also considered as a system consisting of objectives, methodology, resources and evaluation (Oviedo, 2013). To be sure, this

concept must be viewed from a perspective that goes beyond pragmatics, since its systemic organization involves power speeches, and power relations are the ones that are highlighted in its implementation.

From social epistemology, the curriculum is seen as a practice of social regulation revealed as an effect of power. It is a problem of power, produced through the generation of rules and standards of truth, being also a particular historically formed knowledge that inscribes those rules and standards in shaping the ways from which it is based upon the world and upon ourselves, as productive beings of that world. From the context of this study, one important feature, which is particularly highlighted is: the curriculum as a disciplinary technology, which directs the individual to act, feel and see the world in a certain way, disciplining their actions (Popkewitz, 1997a) and shaping the senses of their future actions.

These characteristics of the curriculum from social epistemology are revealed in various situations of educational exercise during COVID-19. In the initial months, the curricular organization was shown as the result of power speeches, not only because the online modality forced the emphasis on discipline mechanisms for teachers and students, but with this exercise of power relationships, speeches, rules, and standards of truth emerged from the most diverse forms. In addition, the move to virtual classes meant that teachers were enrolled in self-regulation processes that meant spending more hours of the day on work activity.

(...) Teachers... should be available in working hours because it is teleworking... they should have their students' phones, emails and answer queries. High school students from Sierra and Amazonia have a parallel online course (Minister Creamer in *El Universo*, 2020a).

This assertion has at least two implications, on the one hand, the ministerial guideline for teachers to respond to questions of their students, and although it emphasizes: in working hours, this is not real, since virtuality is asynchronous. Thus, the teacher depends on when the students want to ask. In many cases, as Professor Karina López says, the availability of her peasant students is at night (*El Universo*, 2020). On the other hand, the minister talks about teleworking and is not the most appropriate term, since this implies that the employer gives the employee the resources used at work. This is not the case, since the teacher uses his Internet, his computer, his electrical energy, etc. However, this self-regulatory principle could not be effectively transmitted to the students. By not sharing physical space, they lack of traditional forms of disciplining, even though the great self-discipline and self-regulation schemes of see-



ing themselves as members of a community/society (Popkewitz, 1997a) that face COVID-19 will not be disrupted.

The curriculum was also highlighted as a particular knowledge organization from which content was emphasized to maintain a pattern of reasoning that guides the actions of the educational community from certain rules (Popkewitz, 1997a). Indeed, the new educational modality imposed by COVID-19 certainly sets aside the discipline of certain actions, by favoring the transmission of knowledge as closely as possible to the planned curriculum, but at the same time privileging topics suitable to the official discourse of security, of control, of stoicism... with which the curriculum used knowledge as a problem of social regulation (Popkewitz, 1997a). This management could not be maintained, as the nature of the pandemic, attacking on different areas such as the economic structure of the country, the subsistence of the same school institution and the axis of the educational activity, made the entire curricular structure go down, both in the fulfillment of the learning objectives as originally conceived, and the methodology, content and skills.

The curricular structure of Ecuadorian basic education makes it difficult to fulfill the entire curriculum program initially conceived. The health emergency and the compulsory transition from the classroom to the virtual educational modality made evident several characteristics of the national curriculum, such as its rigidity. COVID-19 weakened the power rituals of a curricular proposal that even in times of *normality* did not allow the exercise of curricular diversification in practice, but above all in the fact that its main senses cannot be fulfilled in lesser times.

Virtuality cannot be taught 6 hours in a row. Neither teachers nor students can bear all that time in front of a computer. It was therefore necessary, from improvisation, to prioritize the content to be studied and the skills to be developed. If access to virtual education has already revealed the country's inequities as a structural problem, it was found that the virtual modality was effective for the lower grades and it guarantees more or less adequate training processes, which does not occur in the higher grades, because, in the latter, the complexity of the contents and the need for more personalized accompaniment, causes not to achieve adequate results (Oviedo, 2020).

In general, because of COVID-19 governing body of education had to review the curriculum and to prioritize aspects of the curriculum "that should be taught" by the emergency, without considering the voices of the students. A prioritization that, however, was based in "... debates in the curriculum about what is taught to children (which) are debates

about how we perceive us to be, and how we will present that identity, including what remains as a difference” (Pinar in Popkewitz 1997, p.10). Online classes, due to the pandemic, also means isolation, causing demotivation of both students and teachers. This made it a question of mainstreaming recreation into the virtual educational process, also from an emergency improvisation. However, this transversality led to a relationship that undermined the hierarchical relationships, making them in some cases more horizontal.

As the pandemic progresses, it is also revealed that what matters is not the curricular content to be learned, but above all, the transmission of the educational proposal that reproduces hegemony, underlining the content that must be taught in accordance with the social and economic characteristics of the student. From the prioritization of content, it was considered to highlight those that could be “more useful” for that student who sees himself as a farmer in the future or that student who sees himself as an urban professional. From that perspective, the curriculum also functions as a way to shape an imaginary future of the current student from the more or less approximations that the teacher, the director or the same authorities of the Ministry of Education can have. Hultqvist (1997) reveals a somewhat discouraging truth: “The history of the curriculum in this context can be seen as the history of technologies that transform political rationalities into pedagogies” (Hultqvist in Popkewitz, 1997, p. 22). It is therefore important to look at pedagogies also from their function of technologies and from the character of political rationality, to look at them as power speeches.

### *The speeches of pedagogy*

Pedagogy can also be conceived “as the intention of governing the provisions, sensitivities and alerts of the ‘new’ citizen” (Popkewitz, 1997, p. 22). This new citizen in turn is formed from particular conceptions that are managed since the discursive changes in pedagogical practices, which influence the changes on how to conceive the labor processes. Changes in assumptions about the State and the individual, from cultural spaces, are also related as changes of pedagogy (Popkewitz, 1991).

It can also be seen from a technical conception from which learning is divided into parts. This division has its origin in the Cartesian and Rationalist conceptions that reflect knowledge, since the pedagogical exercise implies social assumptions and implications (Popkewitz, 1988).



From the studies carried out in the classroom, it can be said that pedagogical speeches “do not function as an abstract set of ideas to be transposed into and within mental consciousness” (Luke in Popkewitz, 1997a, p. 144), but as a series of processes that inscribe subjectivity attributes in the social body. As part of pedagogical speeches, there are also ways of literacy models, which in schooling show themselves as ‘particular postures. Thus, for example, the correct way to keep the body when reading, silence, gestures, and signs of “being studying” that involve particular codes, which in turn denote ways of acting, seeing, speaking, and feeling of the student (Popkewitz, 1997). These ways are assumed from disciplining forms that indicate right and wrong, along with discursive practices that determine a specific regime of schooling, “a regime of remembering and forgetting, of assuming standardized identities through discursive practices and through unpredictable fun” (Fendler in Popkewitz, 1997, p. 23), but not only ways of learning and schooling regimes indicate pedagogical speeches and thus the production of a certain type of individuals. An important role in this production is the curriculum, knowledge forms and teaching didactics. It is in this transmission of knowledge and even in science itself and its microprocesses that it is evident. Those “microprocesses to produce individuals who are self-moving, self-responsible and ‘reasonable people’” (Popkewitz, 1997, p. 22).

To achieve these objectives, psychology is needed, which is neither a mental discipline nor a research science (O’Donnell in Popkewitz, 1988). If pedagogy is in charge of the teaching processes, psychology is in charge of assuming the learning processes and thus, especially in the field of education, was constituted as the intellectual base and scientific legitimizer of utilitarian activities (O’Donnell in Popkewitz, November 1988). From its role as a scientific legitimizer, psychology became important and was introduced into mass education:

As a technology for the restructuring of how individuals should be viewed, defined and evaluated (...) the various psychologies provided technologies for organizing classroom didactics, instructional materials, and school hours, topics around which children should ‘learn’ (O’Donnell in Popkewitz, 1988, p. 237).

But also, the speeches of pedagogy are used and are influenced by the theories of organization and learning that mark their own institutional styles. Thus, together with school rituals, the ultimate objective is “to project the image of a modern institution that is efficient and rational” (Popkewitz, 1988, p. 234).



The scope of pedagogical speeches goes beyond the educational institution, and it uses processes that function as social technologies and that can be both local and global. From the innovations developed in the educational institution in a particular way, to trends of educational or curricular reform of a global character, as the curricular reforms of the 20th century in general that sought for students to understand who they are and their role in a society (Popkewitz, 1997a), or the neoliberal reforms of the 90s seeking that teachers, students and parents internalize the economic and managerial discourse (Torres, 2012).

Pedagogical speeches as social technology of the educational proposal also came into crisis with the pandemic. This questioning emerged from the difficulties of the online pedagogical proposal at the beginning of the health crisis, especially in the public sector. In the first few months under the new educational modality, the main concern of the Ministry of Education was for teachers to check their work, to fill out forms that demonstrate their virtual educational activity. In other words, pedagogical practice was revealed in two ways as an exercise of power. On the one hand, by making visible the subtle forms of control that in *normal* days (Pre COVID) were administrative reports that had to be filled, a bureaucratic requirement that reduced time to classroom activity. Now, these are represented by control devices that show the punitive character.

The starting point of the crisis of educational speeches was not only the little training of teachers for this new modality, but the little training in pedagogical innovations in a general way; all this leading to poor learning results. The lack of knowledge to choose activities conducive to this modality, for the proper recreation of the curriculum and even to evaluate, predict results that are not satisfactory (Oviedo, 2020).

The structure of the educational system and its institutionality bet that the curriculum in exercise should be kept from the family. This revealed that, regardless of urban or rural reality, parents cannot be the only one or the most appropriate support for the presentation and conduction of content, particularly in higher courses. Are all parents trained to solve a differential calculation problem? Certainly, very few are. The role of the teacher has been revalued (as have the role of doctors and nurses), at least for the time being. Ecuadorian society sees that it is not easy to educate, and parents value the long days in which children and young people are not with parents, activities that were little valued by society, before the pandemic. However, this momentary revaluation of the teacher is not the only positive element. A change, despite being forced, is always an opportunity.



## Opportunities offered by COVID-19 to Ecuadorian Education

In July 2020, 1 927 000 primary and secondary students from Sierra and Amazonia (El Universo, 2020) finished their school year and studied their last three months at home. March 13, 2020, was the last day of school for others. On May 4, the Costa regime started classes online and many students from the previous academic year did not enroll. According to Education Minister Montserrat Creamer in *El Comercio*, 2020, the budget reduction for education is approximately \$894 million (El Comercio, 2020).

In this context, there are the concerns of Popkewitz (1997a): “Should schooling concern itself with the nature of training? Should the curriculum produce a more socially efficient worker and citizen? Should we think about enabling children to develop more effectively?” (p. 143).

The answers to these questions are relevant, as they invite changes that go beyond the pandemic and generate qualitative changes as returning to *normality*. If, on the one hand, the pandemic has modified educational activity, making it difficult to conduct it, on the other, if looking at it, it is an opportunity for the various social sectors to look at education from a strategic perspective. This means transcending the two or three years in which coronavirus will accompany the world and rather directing the lines of action for long-term horizons.

The strategic aspect of education considers a deep research as its starting point. It is necessary to know theories and recreate them on agreements to our needs. If scientific research in our country, in general, is low, research in education is even more so. In fact, Suppes’ assertion invites state officials, academics, and others to think seriously about this topic.

It is common to think and say that what is most needed in education is wisdom and a broad understanding of the issues that confront us. In no way. What we need are deeply structured theories in education that drastically reduce and eliminate the need for wisdom (Suppes in Popkewitz, 1984, p. 1).

From this premise and following the order of the three concepts focused on this research, one can first reflect on rethinking education and the educational institution by looking beyond its informational and reproductive orientation, underlining the formative approach linked to critical contextualization, cosmovision and vision of the future of students and communities. Learning is linked to movement and personal contact to maieutical action; therefore, a new schooling is needed that



would care about training beyond axiology, without considering the response to the needs of the company and the selection of labor as its ultimate aim or exclusively training for work. This time shows the impossibility of traditionally conceived schooling, which has encouraged the search for creative learning mechanisms, consciously or unconsciously, taking into account that all learning discourse and organizational procedures are intimately linked to demands, expectations and emotions (Popkewitz, 1988).

It should be thought whether school practice should continue to overestimate the forms of discipline and the discourse signed by efficiency, since both looked at in their exercise toward students. "The school must look at the reconstruction of society from the empowerment of its students to develop a more critical understanding of institutions and social issues" (Popkewitz, 1997a, p. 143), but it must also be guided to their teachers.

These months of health emergency have shown the need to review the curriculum not only in its organization (which for many may seem untouchable), but above all in its curricular diversification and local demands. The needs generated by the emergency strengthened this type of curricular recreation by boosting learning communities on public and private campuses; important associations linked to education and school that did not occur before the pandemic. These processes must continue in the days after the emergency and must be thought, deeply, if lots of assignments should be continue, since it is bureaucratic for the teacher and the student. It must be thought if the masterclass continues to be privileged and if discipline really matters too much. Non-classroom education does not have a rigid curriculum, which in turn responds to power rituals typical of a style of schooling, which are not effective online (Oviedo, 2020). It is necessary for the school to discuss the social structure from power relations, for children and young people to know the senses of their reproductive and liberating character. And there is much to do with the curriculum and its construction, which, as referred by Professor Popkewitz (1997a) it must link "our ways of speaking and reasoning in school and — the ways in which we "say the truth" about ourselves and others— with the issues of power and regulation" (p. 9).

COVID-19 invites processes of discussion among all sectors to re-evaluate the teaching profession. Families understood that during this time parents could not become teachers, and although parents wanted to help their kids to access the information sent by the professor (teacher Claudia Tobar in El Universo, 2020), this was not effective in all cases.



Umberto Eco (2007) reminds us that the role of the teacher has already changed before the Internet. That role of knowledge holder, ceased to be its main feature, since now that role is held by any search engine, such as Google. The role of the teacher, in the age of the Internet, showed his characteristics as mediator, facilitator and coach of learning. The person in charge of helping to discern the information offered by the Internet, the motivator for students to link to learning chains, self-learning and research. The teacher is the one who allows constant dialogue, confrontation of opinions and discussion between what comes from outside and what is in school (Eco, 2007).

From these assumptions: is it better for the teacher to fill out dozens of administrative forms that show evaluation and control, or to plan carefully and teach his class from meaningful learning? The reality, which always ultimately determines developments, shows a preference for planning and conduction of the plan.

COVID-19 also brought the attention of the Governing Ministry to something now urgent, but always important: technical assistance. The Ministry created “pedagogical plans for each day, subject, level... readings... tasks and activities that must be done. These tasks are not graded. Students do them, keep them, and when we return to face-to-face classes, they will present them” (Minister Creamer in El Universo 2020a). Continuing this initiative, an institutional and social process for teacher qualifications should be directed. Training that must be directed not only in software or online didactic mechanisms, but to integral formative processes and in an institutional reorganization that allow to revalue the teaching career.

If there are no technical possibilities to conduct online education in rural education, this is the opportunity to generate processes of local participation in learning, in the diversification of the curriculum, in the relevance..., from an honest dialogue, yielding power, as Bakhtin mentioned (1981). Without fear of political discussion in all spaces “some educational programs are based on political theories to encourage participation”, and assigning this topic in the curricular organization means accepting a series of assumptions about the world that are not postulated or codified” (Popkewitz, 1984, p. 15).

In view of the structural impossibility that rurality is virtually educated, the ministry should rather support, with all its technical and economic resources, the local communities to generate their own educational proposals, those that the inhabitants consider appropriate to their reality, transcending developmentalism and paternalism. There is

the advantage of having organized people and nationalities, because it is with them, with the second-degree organizations that the education they want can be built. In the days leading up to the Correism (2007-2017), it was demonstrated how these interactions between the State and the organizations worked properly in indigenous and peasant communities, for example, in school-based schools, with cultural relevance.

This normative element (LOEI) called 'interculturality' should be taken seriously and *diversity* should be looked at without suspicion. This is a crucial task for society as a whole and also involves rethinking the curriculum project, starting from a study that allows to understand how the *other* has been excluded in their reasoning systems and inclusion categories, leaving only the meaning of the different, defined as the one who is not perceived and classified as *normal* (Popkewitz, 1997, p. 26).

It is in this period that developmentalist speeches must transcend. As Popkewitz (1998) once again said, quoting Freire and Vigotsky: "A constructive vision of knowledge can be emphasized if it arises from community participation" (Popkewitz, p. 224). This unwelcome presence of COVID-19 can be used to give us the opportunity to make changes in the sense of Ecuadorian education, to overcome this homogenizing and disciplining educational proposal that have limited for decades the development of children, youth, teachers and parents in our country.

## Conclusions

Not being able to go to school and socialize questions the meaning of education in the school. It is even necessary, given the circumstances, to think about something to replace it. COVID-19 may be the beginning of the end of that institution.

The school operates according to rules and procedures that give coherence and meaning to daily activities, above all, from interaction. Schooling must then be rethought, because this is an institutional agreement, where certain forms of knowledge are emphasized and others are intentionally omitted. True agreements must then be generated to give meaning to discussions about what to learn, what sociocultural values to teach; even more so if students cannot be in front of a screen 6 hours, for 5 days a week. If the day-to-day changes, if the interaction is reduced, schooling must be structurally reformed.

From a long-term perspective, we must look at the various pedagogical processes, the schooling processes, the curricular developments



and, above all, the power relations to which COVID-19 forced to adapt. This crisis allows education to be rethought, beyond adaptations to a non-face context.

Solutions are also needed for immediate problems, such as immediately conducting training days in virtual education, reorganizing learning schedules, reflecting on the mix of face-to-face, virtual, and distance learning. The intention is to keep in mind that there is no learning without understanding. The lack of concept understanding, process knowledge or heuristics for problem solving have occurred before COVID-19.

Consideration should be given to the overevaluation of the role of educational psychology in the curricular organization that is traditionally linked to academic discipline, curriculum and evaluation and responsible of achieving the successful relation of the individual with the environment.

Change does not come from the evolutionary progression of events or people's efforts to influence those events. Change is disturbing and consists in breaking into our forms of reasoning and identities, which hide power relations (Butler in Popkewitz, 1991). COVID-19 obliges change and any process of change must bear in mind the introduction of new practices and their interrelationship with existing structures and their rules, to challenge, modify or legitimize the agreements reached.

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