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## INSTITUTIONS, PUBLIC POLICY AND PRACTICE OF ETHNO-EDUCATION IN COLOMBIA

*Instituciones, políticas públicas y práctica  
de etno-educación en Colombia*

*Institutions, les politiques publiques et la pratique  
des ethno-éducation en Colombie*

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RESUMEN: La política, la legislación y las instituciones que surgieron después de la Constitución de 1991 en Colombia fueron notoriamente influenciadas por una nueva agenda. En el ámbito académico, el idioma y la cultura empezaron a desempeñar un papel central en las nuevas epistemologías y producciones teóricas. Por lo que se refiere a las prácticas sociales, la dimensión cultural no sólo se contempla sino que se exige como un componente fundamental y esencial de los planes de desarrollo nacionales, regionales o locales. Ciertamente, la mayoría de los estudios educativos contemporáneos y de los sistemas de educación pública han llegado a comprometer esta nueva tendencia culturalista. Con el objetivo de construir una crítica más detallada con respecto al concepto y la práctica de ciertas categorías culturales dentro de la educación pública en Colombia, se realiza un análisis desde cuatro perspectivas: jurídico-legal, política, institucional y académica. Para un país

como Colombia, la filosofía, la reflexión teórica, política y pedagógica sobre el tema de la educación y la cultura es un imperativo inmediato para mejorar el sistema de educación pública y la estabilización de la sociedad.

*Palabras clave:* política, práctica, educación, cultura, desarrollo, Colombia.

**SUMMARY:** The politics, the legislation and the institutions which emerged after the 1991 Constitution in Colombia were notoriously influenced by a new agenda. In the academic arena, language and culture began to play a central role in the new epistemologies and theoretical productions. As far as social practices are concerned, the cultural dimension was not only contemplated but demanded, as a fundamental and essential component of national, regional or local development plans. Certainly, most of the contemporary education studies and public education systems have come to engage this new culturalist tendency. With the aim of constructing a more detailed criticism with respect to the concept and practice of certain cultural categories within public education in Colombia, an analysis can be done from the four previously mentioned perspectives: juridical-legal, political, institutional and academic. For a country like Colombia, the philosophical, theoretical, political and pedagogical reflection on the subject of education and culture is an immediate imperative to improve the public education system and the stabilization of society.

*Key words:* politic, practice, education, culture, development, Colombia.

**RÉSUMÉ:** Politique, législation et institutions qui a émergé après la Constitution de 1991 en Colombie ont été fortement influencée par un nouvel ordre du jour. Dans le milieu universitaire, de la langue et de la culture a commencé à jouer un rôle central dans les nouvelles épistémologies et des productions théoriques. En ce qui concerne les pratiques sociales, la dimension culturelle non seulement envisagée mais il est tenu comme un élément fondamental et essentiel des plans de développement nationaux, régionaux ou locaux. Certes, la plupart des études contemporaines et des systèmes éducatifs de sensibilisation du public en sont venus à commettre cette nouvelle tendance culturaliste. Afin de construire une critique plus détaillée sur le concept et la pratique de certaines catégories culturelles au sein de l'enseignement public en Colombie, une analyse sous quatre angles: juridique, politique, institutionnel et académique. Pour un pays comme la Colombie, de la philosophie, théorique, politique et éducatif sur le thème de l'éducation et de la culture est un impératif immédiat pour améliorer le système d'éducation du public et la stabilisation de la société.

*Mots clés:* politique, pratique, éducation, culture, développement, Colombie.

## 1. PRELIMINARY APPROACH

The politics, the legislation and the institutions which emerged after the 1991 Constitution in Colombia were notoriously influenced by a new agenda. In the academic arena, language and culture began to play a central role in the new epistemologies and theoretical productions; the traditional social and economic categories of modern social studies lost strength compared to the new linguistic and cultural categories of contemporary cultural and postcolonial studies.

As far as social practices are concerned, the cultural dimension was not only contemplated but demanded, as a fundamental and essential component of national, regional or local development plans. Certainly, most of the contemporary education studies and public education systems have come to engage this new culturalist tendency. Especially Colombia and the less-developed countries of the South are demanding a social welfare model of national development (Mundy, 1998).

Nevertheless, there is still much to be done in the country in order to achieve a well-conceived understanding of the approach and role of culture, as an essential element for development. The principal views that we have constructed in the last three decades (legal, political, institutional and academic) are not always congruent and on occasions are contradictory. Meanwhile in the political and legal arena important advances have been made, the institutional as well as the academic sector have a pending task in this matter. For a country like Colombia, the philosophical, theoretical, political and pedagogical reflection on the subject of education and culture is an immediate imperative to improve the public education system and the stabilization of society. We still have to advance in the creation of interpretations, understandings and views that are more suitable to the social and cultural reality, in the search for rights in a social state that protects and unites the Nation, to think, dream and design a country where all Colombians are included.

The approach we have made to write this essay has been the hermeneutic deconstructive interpretation, where we have analyzed and interpreted several government documents, formal institutions, laws and bills, native organizations, universities and texts written by relevant authors. In addition, we have carried out an ethnic raid, where we have analyzed and recorded cultural practices in situ.

Deconstruction, as defined by Derrida (1997), is everything and nothing at the same time. It is not a general theory or method, but a tool which helps us to understand and see what is really needed. Therefore, deconstruction is used as a hermeneutic path, as a process and thanks to that process the concept transcends and reveals itself (Cruz, 2012).

We think that hermeneutics is deconstructive because of its proposal to destroy the limits to build them again. In this sense, the hermeneutic method acquires an

epistemological dynamic which allows us to understand the text using one or more disciplines of the human and social sciences (disciplinary) and link it to what is achieved by combining several disciplines (interdisciplinary).

Deconstruction allows us to understand these groups' texts, which have built their own universe and social relations based on other ontological basis of action, other philosophical thoughts and other epistemological elements. Deconstructive hermeneutics allows us to put ourselves in the place of others to understand what they propose.

When applying the hermeneutic method, we have to take into account the existence of a category concerning the interpretation quality of the meaning. Such category is based on the ability to tune and synchronize the factors which were mentioned earlier.

All these previous considerations allow us to raise the methodological position of hermeneutics. When reading a text, it is important to use the same interpretive framework which the groups used to produce it or make an effort to approach this framework. Thus, we do not make the mistake of pigeonholing into the thinking of a particular group when tackling specific issues.

In groups and social movements it has been reported that pragmatics is the most important area in producing meaning even ahead of semiotics and semantics. The latter two are formed when the sample groups' practice shows who the authors or actors are and what the purposes, intentions, agendas and senses are. Only then, we can refine the meanings more clearly within the texts, conversations and new practices. Implementing hermeneutics requires, above all, reading groups in their practices and actions, in a current and normal ethnography before they write their texts and manifestos.

To do this work, we have studied deeply Colombia's cultural and educational policies in the last thirty years. We have also analyzed and interpreted the cultural practices of native people and the relationship between cultural and political practices.

With the aim of constructing a more detailed criticism with respect to the concept and practice of certain cultural categories within public education in Colombia, an analysis can be done from the four previously mentioned perspectives: juridical-legal, political, institutional and academic.

The juridical-legal view is studied on the basis of the Colombian Constitution of 1991 and some subsequent regulatory laws, especially the Law 115/94 (General Law of Education) and the Law 397/97 (General Law of Culture). The political view is analyzed from the contents of the cultural and educational subject matter that appears within the last five National Plans for Development (PND); these plans have secured the official political course of action during the last twenty years, the post-constitutional era. The institutional and academic perspective can be constructed based on the previous ones, supported by the information obtained from some officials of Ministry of National Education (MEN) responsible for education in Colombia, as well as reports from some academic events such as the

Ethno-education congresses as well as the Anthropology ones. Finally the set of the four previous perspectives (political, legal, institutional and academic) exhibits the corpus and the evidence of Colombian public policy in order to serve cultural diversity in the education system; in other words they demonstrate the model of Ethno-Education.

## 2. THE MODEL OF ETHNO-EDUCATION IN COLOMBIA FROM A COMPARATIVE VIEW IN LATIN AMERICA

Education and the rights of indigenous groups is a current topic of interest in comparative education, and politically, transnational movements for social justice are able to reinforce one another and call on the international community to support their struggles. This has happened with various movements, particularly ethnic minority, as they demand fundamental human rights for their members, one of which is a right to a quality education (Arrove, 2009).

From our point of view, the ethno-education model strengthened a markedly ethnicist and divided view population wise, in relation to the way that culture and cultural diversity are incorporated within the Colombian public education. This view has also generated a tendency that only obscures and complicates other expressions of cultural diversity in the society and the political essence of constitutional pluralism of 1991, but also said tendency is highly dangerous since it can engender future ethnic radicalism, weaken the State, make official institutions illegitimate and break the collective project of Nation and *Colombianidad*. Poor political management of the cultural diversity would not only contribute to deepen the current social crisis but will weaken it as a country in confronting the challenges that appear in the international arena. The idea of «strategic essentialism», proposed by Spivak (1985), can be seen in a lot of situations where there are relationships between ethnic groups and other individuals. What is more, it makes the differences explicit when these groups want to achieve their recognition on behalf of the State. If inter-ethnic relations in Colombia are not managed with caution, it could be setting up a time serious problem in the future. Public education has an enormous responsibility to achieve peace; education should be studied and managed in relation to an inclusive cultural policy.

We have to bear in mind that the native movement in Colombia runs parallel with the native movement of the other Latin-American countries. Since the 1990s, Latin America has been making significant government efforts in Bilingual Intercultural Education (González Pérez, 2011). With few differences in concept and expression, most countries have declared themselves multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural in their constitutions: Colombia in 1991, Mexico and Paraguay in 1992, Peru in 1993, Bolivia in 1994. Equally, most countries' Ministries of Culture and cultural policies were established during this decade in the region.

In addition, Colombian Ethno-Education is the result of several approaches and events which have happened within the framework of Latin America. In this

respect, the various Latin-American States and Governments as well as the Native communities and organizations have taken action to solve the social and educative problems. Such actions used to be parallel, then they used to diverge and now they tend to converge. The concept of Ethno-education in Colombia comes from a cultural and educative shared framework. We also stated that the 169 Convention, The International Organization of Labor (also known as ILO-convention 169) is one of the illustrative and normative frameworks which had, and still has, more influence in Colombia. The ILO-convention 169 was worked out in Geneva in 1989 and it deals with the rights of Native and tribal people (García Bravo and Martín Sánchez, 2011). In addition to the above-mentioned constitutional and legal developments, Colombia adheres to several legal regulations at the international level ratified by several governments; ILO-convention 169, was ratified by the Colombian government by Law 21 in 1991. Further information can be obtained by visiting the Juriscol data base at the Banco de la República, the native legislation compilation at Inter-American Bank of Development, the information uploaded on the «Dirección de Etnias del Ministerio del Interior y de Justicia» link (2004), and the data base at Hemera Foundation.

From a comparative view, it is important to shed light on some concepts from Canadian political theory. It is very common to find European theorists who have a different interpretation and use of those concepts in comparison with American theorists. To some Spaniards, social reality is multicultural; therefore, intercultural policies are required. In Canada, diversity is a social reality, and inter or multi are cultural policies. The same happens in the United States, with a coexistence of multiculturalism treated as a developed culture with others which are respected (Escarbajal, 2010). Diversity is a social reality that requires a cultural policy. In Latin America the situation is a little bit confusing only because rigorous conceptualization is absent, as I mentioned before, as well as the role that some academics play with regard to politicians.

### 3. THE ROLE OF THE JURIDICAL-LEGAL VIEW OF CULTURE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION IN COLOMBIA

Among the principle statements raised in the Colombian Constitution, with respect to culture and education, we can highlight 22 articles of the 380 that make up the complete constitutional text. In addition to Preamble, the following are the articles 1, 7, 8, 10, 13, 18, 19, 27, 38, 43, 63, 67, 68, 70, 71, 72, 96, 107, 171, 176, 246, and 330.

The General Law of Education is both extensive and precise in regard to the recognition of cultural rights within the public system of education. It is important to highlight that the law mentions various social groups and categories of groups as subjects of laws (people with limited or exceptional capacities, adults, ethnics, farmers and marginalized people). Nevertheless, the Law 115/94 further entitles developments on education for ethnic-status groups (ethno-education). At the

same time, the Law 397/97 highlights the followings rights regarding culture and education.

The General Law of Education was enacted in 1997 thus giving birth to the National Cultural System. Having reached the status of public policy, culture became a sector of development thereby receiving a yearly public budget allocation for the Ministry's activities. Culture was also integrated in the formulation of economic and social macro policies and of course, it began to have an influence in other sectors of development among them, the educational sector.

However, it is necessary to spend some time considering some aspects of these new cultural rights enshrined in the Constitution and the laws. The first aspect would be «scope», followed by «type» and then «level» in the third place.

First of all, the formulation of an ideology of pluralism for the country results from the existence of a broad concept of culture and cultural diversity. The text of the Constitution and several pieces of legislation mention factors such as ethnicity, language, sex, race, country of origin, family origin, religion, political affiliation, philosophical opinion, social class, physical condition, mental condition, academic-cognitive conscience, association, gender, artistic activity, age and region among others. We have to take into account that ethnicity is just another factor of cultural diversity in the Constitution and now it has a special importance which did not use to have. Secondly, the Constitution and the laws provide different types of legal recognition to each cultural diversity factor.

The more authentic meaning of ethnicity is that which defines it as «a construct, a myth constantly being reshaped in the course and for the purpose of social action» (Baud, Koonings, Oostindie, Ousweneel and Silva, 1996: 12).

Ethnicity is the most comprehensive, substantially developed factor of cultural diversity and a bit problematic. On the one hand, the only social groups in Colombia with a recognized ethnic status are the Native people, the Blacks or Afro-Colombians, the «Raizales» and the Roma (Gypsies). Nevertheless each group has had a very distinct historic process of social construction which eventually led them to establish specific and different relations with the State and the Nation (García Bravo and Martín Sánchez, 2011). Even the Native category is a generalization, as every Native group developed differently both socially and historically.

The level of political protection of cultural rights as stated in the text of the constitution is always based on the idea of Nation –a unitary, unique Nation. There is a legal recognition of cultural diversity in Colombia under a principle of social and territorial cohesion. The ethnic cultural agenda can be seen among the main articles of the Constitution because it guarantees such rights. For example, identity is warranted in Articles 7 and 8. Languages are warranted in Article 10. Education is warranted in Article 68. Land is warranted in Articles 63, 70, 329 and 357. Own righteousness is warranted in Article 246. Self-government is warranted in Articles 286, 287 and 330. Political participation is warranted in Articles 40, 171, 176, 329 and 339. When referring to diversity there is always a glimpse of Nation, the *Colombianidad*. It is remarkable that the constitutional text not even once singles

out any of the ethnic groups as different but rather as a component or as part of the cultural diversity of the Nation. Nowhere in the Constitution or the laws is there mention of the words multinational State for example, as just happened in the neighbouring country of Ecuador (Ecuadorian Constitution of 2008). While several pieces of legislation after the Constitution resort to the use of terms like «different», «foreign», «own», «other», etc, the Constitutional text and the body of law to date are more based on the conceptions of diversity and alterity than on difference and otherness.

Based on the above, it is appropriate to question two things: first, the way in which we have understood all this and second, the way in which these factors, types and levels of diversity –both real and legal– are included in Colombian public education. The legal progress is significant. However, a critical look at the political and institutional aspects of culture in the public education system shows that, in the Colombian case we have «translated» ethnicity as diversity. This limited interpretation has led the Colombian State, the governments of the moment, society, public policies, institutions and the country in general to the conception and promotion of an ethnicist agenda in order to recognize and guarantee the collective and individual rights of Colombians based on culture. Obviously the wider concept of cultural diversity which deals with other factors and social groups is not present in legislation, politics, institutions and the academic world, observed an emphasis on competitive aspects in the national cohesion of ethnic groups through equal treatment in education and culture (Carnoy and Rhoten, 2002). From our view, legal developments distance themselves from the constitutional approach of culture, diversity, pluralism and nation in many cases. A segregating ethnic policy is created for the education system and intergroup relations in the nation when a specific education program is only set for Native people.

The above implies a political and social risk as the out and out ethnicization of the inter-group relations can bring about problems of governability, institutional illegitimacy and crisis of the State. Moreover, national unity could become fragmented and affect territorial integrity, all of which would leave us in very bad standing to face the international challenges of this new century as a country and as a nation. These examples of group contradiction are many and have become increasingly frequent in the Colombian media. The Constitutional principle of cultural diversity plus social cohesion is not honoured in Colombian institutions. On their part, the academic world and the social movements have also devoted themselves to promoting the reduced ethnicist agenda as the only way to promote cultural diversity.

It is strange that while the Colombian Constitution has an inherent multicultural aspiration summarized in Article 7° (Pineda, 1995; Gross, 2000; Zambrano, 2006), public policies of an ethnic nature (among them ethno-education) suggest an intercultural aspiration.

The intercultural approach is based on the ability which ethnic groups should have to determine the discreet and self-contained limits of culture, what is own and



different to them. More than highlighting the common aspects and affinities of the groups we have to emphasize on the things which make us different. This vision of interculturality has immediate repercussions in the roles we give to groups and to culture itself, as part of the country's educational and cultural project. As far as we are concerned, in many cases, legal and institutional developments distance themselves from the constitutional approach to culture, diversity, pluralism and Nation. Legislating specific educational standards based on ethnicity creates an ethnic segregationist policy for the education system and the inter-group relations of the Nation; it would be akin to a legalization of educational segregation in Colombia.

#### 4. THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN COLOMBIAN PUBLIC EDUCATION FROM A POLITICAL STANDPOINT

Past National Development Plans (PND - Spanish acronym), especially those written after the new Constitution of 1991 are a good source to study the contribution of culture to the development of the country from a political standpoint.

Former President Cesar Gaviria's Development Plan (1990-1994) was presented to the country in a period of great changes. Among them, the most significant was undoubtedly the new Constitutional charter of 1991. The «Pacific Revolution» Plan was aimed at transforming the structure of the State in keeping with the trends of the time, which favored a less protective, more regulatory State; a nation based on the demand for goods and services and a blind hope in the economic technical model to solve the country's problems. That may be the reason for the weakness of the social policy mentioned above. Although education and the educational sector were part of the plan, culture was not even given the honor of being the great absentee for its weight in public life was so insignificant that none of the other sectors perceived its absence. The main focus of the plan was a citizen with greater economic and political opportunities rather than a nation of diversities and social groups articulated in a project of a country with different regional and historic realities.

Former President Ernesto Samper's motto «Time belongs to people» (1994-1998) reflected his government plan's aspiration of alternative development which aimed at turning citizens into receivers in the quest for progress by society and the State. The letter of the plan quite extensively covers the technical, political and financial ideas of one of the most ambitious social policies of the last four presidents backed by a big budget law. Culture, ethnicity and education are thoroughly developed in the plan which includes many of the constitutional and legal ideas after 1991. For the first time, culture acknowledgement played a main role in the political life of the country as a public policy issue and in close relation with the education sector.

Former President Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) offered the Nation a Government Plan that was based on several strategies aimed at restoring peace in the country

as a prerequisite for any development process. His proposal was designed to share responsibility among the several agents of society so that each could assume their commitment to the administration of development. The Plan invited agencies not only from the State, but also from civil society to participate in the administration and to commit their resources. The wording of the Plan contains a social policy based on participation and reconstruction of the social fabric thereby highlighting several rights and responsibilities of the State and society towards culture and education. With respect to culture, Andrés Pastrana was the first President that incorporated the term multicultural/multiculturalism in Colombian politics, especially in his Government Plan. However, along with his multiculturalism proposal there is mention of political aspirations for integration, Ethno-education and interculturality. This validates our assertion that, the philosophical clarity and conceptual precision of these types of political concepts and terms in the country are not very rigorous, nor were they for the President or his team of academic aides in those days.

The first National Development Plan of President Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010) was formulated in one of the most hopeless moments in the country due to the failure of negotiations by former President Pastrana with the FARC guerrilla. Faced with the violent onslaught the country was suffering on the hands of the guerrilla, paramilitary groups, drug traffickers, ordinary criminals and at times the very forces of the State, the Colombian society set its hopes on President Uribe and elected him for his proposal of Democratic Security and the firm character he showed during his campaign. The «Towards a Community State» PND can be resumed in four objectives: Offer democratic security; Boost a sustainable economic development and job creation; Build social equity; Increase the State transparency and efficiency.

As can be expected, the third objective includes the entire social policy of the Plan, which is presented in Chapter III. Therefore, the majority of the proposals revolve around the issue of democratic security, economic growth and administrative reorganization of the State. If instead we study Chapter III of the PND we can establish that the issue of culture places ninth, before the issue of sports promotion and after issues like: education, health, solidarity economy, social countryside management, public services, microenterprise development, urban life quality and prevention of natural risks. This «shameful» ninth place gives us a hint about the importance of culture in the political agenda of President Uribe. Based on this, we could assert that the little space that culture gained in the country's political arena after the Constitution of 1991, began to lose ground with the arrival of Dr. Álvaro Uribe to the Presidency. Title 9 of Chapter III related to culture contains the following:

9. Strengthening of ethnic groups
  - a. Native people
  - b. Afro Colombians
  - c. Raizales of San Andres, Providencia and Santa Catalina
  - d. Romas (PND, 2003: 250).

The above content also clearly illustrates the ethnicist conception of the former President and his advisors in their approach to the issue of culture and cultural diversity of the Colombian Nation. The vision and agenda of the PND for meeting the needs and protecting the rights of the above mentioned ethnic groups is outlined in barely six pages of the 284 pages in the entire document. The other categories and groups of national diversity were made completely invisible in the official political discourse of this Plan (with the exception of gender as a social and economic category) and subsumed in those chapters that refer to the issues of democratic security, economic development and reorganization of the State.

Starting 2006, former President Álvaro Uribe introduces newer and wider developments of the cultural issue in his political agenda for the country. Chapter VII, entitled Special dimensions of Development, incorporates diversity factors like gender, ethnicity, age and region. On the issue of ethnicity «palenqueros» are mentioned as a new ethnic group along those already mentioned before. Although his conception of cultural diversity within public policy now goes beyond the sole ethnic dimension, the political conception of cultural diversity remains subordinated to development factors that are more important to the President such as democratic security, economic development and reorganization of the State. This PND, which was formulated for his second term, also shows progress in the formulation of a concept of interculturality as a framework for intergroup relations in the country. Strangely, the content formulated by the President under the title of interculturality, does not match the traditional concept of interculturality stated by academic groups in Colombian political theory neither the pragmatic suggestions of ethnic social movements. This theoretical-conceptual gap once again shows the need for a stricter philosophical and theoretical framework for the formulation of public policies with cultural content in Colombia.

The new PND reintroduces and presents several working strategies agreed upon by the State and Native organizations in a more concrete way to achieve the goals set out by the Plan. In the issue of Native education, for example, an agreement was reached within the political model of Ethno-education by putting emphasis on the premises of coverage and quality contained in the global political strategy for the educational sector (The Educational Revolution). In this respect, the Plan stated:

The strengthening of Native education through an agreed definition of Ethno-education programs to be articulated into the educational system ensuring wider coverage in the different levels and quality improvement (PND, 2007: 459).

We would like to call attention to the rhetoric stated in the political manifestos and different PND plans of the former President Uribe and the other former presidents in Colombia. Concepts and ideas come more from PND consultants' academic capacity than a serious discussion about the future of the country. In this sense, political and legal changes in Colombia have become a reality due to the pressure of social movements. Natives and Blacks have been better organized and

supported in this kind of social pressure. A hermeneutic reading on these types of actors would be more focused in order to understand the Constitutional and legal outcomes related to cultural diversity.

The PND current president of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2010), «Prosperity for All», expresses the idea of the present government to generate socio-economic conditions of Colombians. This plan is divided into transverse axes on which sit the other approaches, such as innovation in productive activities, national policies, environmental sustainability, sustainable growth, equality of opportunity, and of course, education. In the cultural and educational, the current plan is primarily aimed at promoting equal opportunities for access to the population of ethnic groups to the benefits of development, with differential approach, the protection of fundamental rights of the ethnic population and strengthening organizations and their own forms of government.

#### 5. THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN COLOMBIAN PUBLIC EDUCATION FROM AN INSTITUTIONAL AND ACADEMIC STANDPOINT

The juridical and political standpoints discussed previously help us characterize the institutional and academic standpoint in order to understand the importance given to culture within the structures of Colombian education.

The Office of Ethno-education was created within the structure of the National Ministry of Education in 1985 under instructions of former President Belisario Betancourt (1982-1986), although the Norm (regulation) was issued in 1984. At the time, a team of five officials –among them two female anthropologists– was hired at the national level to design and promote a public educational policy to meet the claims which Native groups were only then started to demand from the Colombian State in terms of education. By this time, native groups had already gained experience from their own education programs, thanks to international economic aid as well as some national non-native collaborators. Similarly, the University of Cauca had formed a research team on this matter in 1993 supported by the Colombian State.

The MEN (National Ministry of Education) team dealt mainly with these tasks: organizing the First Colombian Symposium on Ethno-education (Girardot, July 1985), the first edition and publication of General Guidelines of Ethno-education and the formulation of the Plan of Native Teaching Training and Professionalization. Regarding these three initial tasks, MEN had published The First General Guidelines on Native Education in 1992. Also, the University of Cauca had organized the First National Meeting on Native Education Experiences, April 1995 in Popayán. At this event, the research team at the University of Cauca officially issued the first academic research in Colombia on the subject-matter of curriculum development for native education as well as some guidelines for teacher training programs geared to native regions.

From the beginning the MEN team embraced the concept and term of Ethno-education to designate the different regional educational experiences and proposals of the time under the direction of Native organizations themselves. This unexpected turn from native education to ethno-education in the Ministry, which was passively accepted by natives, entered the national scenario over the length of a few months. Backgrounds for this turn are in The San José Declaration (Costa Rica, 1982) on Ethno-development. The San José Declaration was introduced at the International Meeting on Ethno-development and Ethnocide in Latin America, called by FLACSO and supported by UNESCO at the end of 1981. This event brought together an important group of Mexican social scientists like Guillermo Bonfil Batalla. This Mexican author became a central figure in proposing and defending the philosophical and theoretical framework of ethno-development and its respective policy of interculturality for Latin America. The event was attended by some Colombian bureaucrats and native representatives that later on became promoters of this political framework in Colombian institutions.

The ethno development and the policy of interculturality that serve as a framework to the model of Ethno-education in Colombia since the 1980s could be analyzed in the light of other approaches and experiences like Canadian multiculturalism.

The State started to transfer institutional responsibilities and official financial resources to the Native political organizations in order to co-administer public education. In this way, Native political organizations –once in resistance and confrontation– started to play an institutional role on behalf of the State and assume public duties in the educational sector: hiring of teachers, teaching training, educational evaluation, curricular design, and textbook publication, among others.

Two other events helped strengthen the institutional development of ethno-education in the country. First, the celebration of the 500 years of Christopher Columbus' arrival to America boosted a series of political, economic and bureaucratic actions both in Europe and the Americas. Such actions created a climate of acceptance, even admiration, for the Native and ethnic agendas in the continent. National and local governments were forced to incorporate changes in their political, legal and financial systems and structures.

Secondly, the country advanced a Constitutional reform in 1991 as mentioned before. This reform took place through a National Constituent Assembly that included three Native members: Lorenzo Muelas (guambiano), Francisco Rojas Birry (embara) and Alfonso Peña (nasa). These three constituent members in addition to the team of advisors and the whole force of the Native social movement, which by then was in full swing, achieved the inclusion of a series of ethnic and cultural rights in the text of the Constitution. Later the groups have demanded compliance with those rights thereby forcing a change or adaptation of the existing institutions as well as the emergence of new institutions in the country.

As far as the Colombian academic world is concerned, its involvement around the issue of ethno-education has not been very clear. First, many collaborators and

activists of the Native social movements from the seventies were leftist academics who gave a political role to their disciplines and professions. Many of these academics later became advisors of the Native constituent members, then senators and elected representatives in later periods. The effort and commitment of these intellectuals and academics is evident in many of the political, legal and constitutional changes that have taken place in the country in the past three decades. On the other hand other academics joined universities from which they advanced research and teaching projects on the different lines and perspectives of education and cultural diversity (Native education, bilingual education, intercultural education, ethno-education, multicultural education). Some devoted themselves to advanced studies on the issue and many of them to the bureaucratic administration of offices, departments, projects and activities related to ethno-education. The academic sector has organized four university events on ethno-education to date: Riohacha, Guajira (1998), Popayán (2000), Santafé de Bogotá (2003) and Riohacha, Guajira (2007). These events have shown not so much the diversity but rather the disparity of philosophical, theoretical and political conceptions on the issue of cultural diversity in education. On many occasions Native organizations have pointed out the futility of these efforts as they are not closely related to their social needs; some of them have even opted for setting up their own Native universities and offer university programs from their own logic, capacities and needs.

The lack of theoretical and conceptual rigor and seriousness on these issues by some academics in the country has made it difficult to build an interpretation that is more pertinent and contextualized to the social, cultural and political conditions.

## 6. DISCUSSION

A hermeneutical practice of the previous ideas (constitutional, legal, political, institutional and academic) allows us to establish that while the ideas and objective have been outlined, the reality and the course of society do not coincide with them. The rights consecrated to Colombians by virtue of culture and their group belonging are not protected within the official policy and institutions. The Ministry of Culture has concentrated its efforts in an artistic-folkloric look at culture. For example, the Division of Ethno-culture was absorbed by the Division of Cultural and Artistic Promotion thereby losing any specificity for the work with ethnic groups. The Ministry of Culture coordinates the National Cultural System through local and regional authorities (local culture committees or councils) which are not always participatory or democratic. This poses a problem of representation and legitimacy that deepens the institutional crisis. This same Ministry does not advance actions for inter-institutional adaptation and coordination with the Ministry of Education for the synchronization of the public policy of education with the public policy of culture.

In the educational sector there is a similar situation of lack of coordination between theory and reality. There are numerous regulations that enshrine the right

to an education based on language and culture but these are not implemented by regional institutions. Although the importance of understanding educational trends and use of language (Fuller, 2004). The interpretation and implementation of the regulations are left in the hands of each official who in turn are not trained or updated as to the educational and cultural regulations. The social relevance as well as the conception and practical implementation of each regulation depend more on the strength of local negotiators and social forces than on the political and ethical reasons set out to build society. Therefore, there is an evident theoretical and conceptual shortage on the cultural issue in relation to issues like Nation, participation, autonomy and common well-being.

Because of the gap between Colombian government's educational policies and approaches, native organizations have pointed out the futility of legislation and government programs as they are not closely related to social needs. Some of them have opted to create their own native universities and they offer degree programs based on their own needs and logical abilities. An example of this is the creation in 2003 of the Intercultural and Native Autonomous University. Its aim is to provide a better access to higher education, and to break down official government impositions (Moreno, 2011), since officials are little prepared or are not prepared at all or due to the force of social negotiators.

For native communities today, the educational approach is very important and they frame it in the current issues which they have to face as native communities. They want to preserve the struggle character to defend their rights, resources and decisions against another culture which is determined to deny as well as recognize their educational history from their histories as people and cultures struggling for survival. Their languages, traditions, own cultures, ancestral knowledge, community practices, and many other issues of each native community, struggle, today, to survive and appreciate versus the imposed culture. Education is no longer understood as a tool to destroy their roots and impose a standard and values of others, to redirect it towards their own world view and life, values and traditions and cultural history of native communities (García Bravo and Martín Sánchez, 2011). It should be understood that the subject's identity is established in relation to the other, in a dimension of reciprocity, the self is educated, is established as authentic existence from the recognition of the other (Marone and Sirignano, 2013), what is needed shared policy.

The national development plans lack continuity, which causes the dispersion of projects, programs and resources. This clearly shows the need to first have State policies before government policies, so as to harmonize these two sectors of development in a longer time frame. In this case, the question is if the government and public schools are locus for creating a collective identity (Welch, 2001). But at the same time, ethnic and population groups as well as other sectors of cultural diversity should think about a project of Nation and *Colombianidad* to propose to the entire country which includes the views of their communities and groups which they can jointly administer taking into account the needs of the Colombian people. Such a vision does not exist.

The Colombian academic world faces a great challenge with respect to clarifying many of the concepts and terms that are used in the formulation of public policy and its later practical implementation. Policies are built with concepts and concepts are built with ideas and words. Words, ideas, concepts and policies are social expressions of power relations and negotiations. Then, the cultural, multicultural and ethnic subject dealt with in the political and legal dimension for which institutional programs are designed is an abstract and artificial entity that does not match the idiosyncrasy of the groups and communities.

Conceptualization works have failed to shape the historic subjects with social sense, cultural body and political relations that inhabit the country. Therefore the groups represented in the institutional and legal texts are artificial stereotypes of the Native, the Afro, the farmer, the disabled person, etc, which later become dysfunctional subjects for public policies. The groups and subjects of cultural diversity express their artificial dysfunctional nature through proposals of self-exclusion or self-segregation that complicate the administration of the country.

Finally, the academic world has devoted itself to the study of the cultural and educational issue from a perspective that is merely enlightened and encyclopaedic rather than from the social and human praxis of the groups in Colombia, who in the end are the ones positively or negatively affected by the social policies that we design today in the country. Therefore they are the ones with whom we should first think, consult, associate and design any educational and cultural policy for all Colombians.

To provide common ground between the approaches and points of view which we have been discussing, the Cauca Ethnic Education Committee, designed and submitted to the Ministry of National Education a work proposal which compromised educational institutions, native organizations, the University of Cauca and the administrative part of PNU and PNR to advance under the guidelines and concrete experiences of ethnoeducation policies of the Universality Plan. However, this project has been submitted as a micro-regional agreement which successfully concluded and coordinates local efforts since 1990 and there has not been any serious and determined support from the central level so far.

The principles of the laws which we have analyzed, incorporating the idea of training, civic education Colombian citizen from a cultural diversity perspective, introducing variations which become necessary and essential in the discussion of culture and education. It is necessary to insist on the idea that when we talk about culture in relation to politics, we refer to cultural politics and political culture (Calvo Población and García Bravo, 2013).

Within the framework and spirit of the Constitution and the law, teaching and training processes must be generated or supported by native organizations and based on a research trajectory and ideological commitment by each institution and organization which brings forward such processes. Thus, the clarity of a new educational native project which is oriented to an ideological and philosophical affiliation with Colombian native communities should be the framework for defining pedagogical processes by the institutions.



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