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The Roles of University Researchers in a University-School Collaborative Action Research Project - A Chinese Experience

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The Roles of University Researchers in a University-School Collaborative Action Research Project - A Chinese Experience

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Abstract

Teacher research as an international movement since the 1970s has been advocated worldwide to promote school curriculum reform and the professionalization of school teachers. University-school collaborative action research is a new attempt to support school teachers who learn to do research in their classrooms while providing opportunities for university researcher to develop a better understanding of classroom practice with more effective strategies to support teacher change. Such collaborative research has been promoted in the recent curriculum reform in basic education in China. This paper reports on an action research project conducted by school teachers supported by university researchers in the Chinese context with a focus on examining the roles and gains of university researchers in this project. Data was collected through project meeting observations, questionnaires, interviews and participants' reflective journals. Both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods were used respectively for analyzing the data collected. The purpose of this study is to understand better the nature of such collaborations and the gains as well as challenges on the part of university researchers so that implications can be drawn for establishing a sound university-school collaborative research body that promotes the professional learning of both parties.

Keywords: action research, university-school collaboration, professional learning, China

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Los Roles de los Investigadores Universitarios en un Proyecto Colaborativo de Investigación-Acción - Una Experiencia China

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Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados de un proyecto de investigación-acción colaborativo llevado a cabo por profesorado de escuela en colaboración con personal investigador universitario en el contexto chino. El objetivo de este estudio es examinar los roles y beneficios para la investigación universitaria de este proyecto. La investigación del profesorado como movimiento internacional, iniciada en los setenta, ha sido defensada mundialmente con el objetivo de promover reformas del currículum escolar y la profesionalización del profesorado. Dicha investigación fue promovida en la última reforma curricular de la educación básica en China. La investigación acción colaborativa entre universidad y escuela es un nuevo intento en dicho contexto para dar apoyo al profesorado de escuela que aprende a realizar investigación en sus clases mientras aportan nuevas oportunidades a la investigación universitaria a través del desarrollo de una mejor comprensión de la práctica con estrategias más efectivas y de apoyo al cambio educativo. El objetivo de este estudio es comprender mejor la naturaleza de dicha colaboraciones y sus beneficios así como los retos existentes del personal investigador universitario. En definitiva, la implementación de dicha colaboración científica promueve el aprendizaje profesional por ambas partes.

Palabras claves: investigación acción, colaboración universidad-escuela, formación continua del profesorado, China

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The 21st century China's curriculum reform in basic education encourages school teachers (STs) to become teacher researchers. By doing research, teachers can become more reflective about their teaching and students' learning so that they are in a better position to solve problems in the classroom and translate curriculum ideas into classroom practice. Action research (AR) as one kind of classroom research has be promoted by the Chinese policy makers as it is seen to be an effective way for teachers to integrate theory with classroom practice (Wang, Zhang & Lin, 2010).

As one type of social enquiry, AR requires the involvement of the participants within the specific social setting, aiming at gaining mutual-understanding and support among participants as well as relieving the sense of isolation on the part of classroom teachers (Wang, 2002). Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) also claim that educational action research needs to be collaborative. In such collaboration, STs may collaborate with their fellow teachers, their students, sometimes parents, and also educational administrators and educational researchers. The university-school collaborative AR model has been increasingly recognized as a way in recent years to establish closer links between university and schools (Clark, 1988; Kersh & Masztal, 1998). There are recognized mutual benefits for both parties through such collaborations (Wang, Zhang, Lin, 2010) which allow STs to gain access to professional support from university researchers in conducting classroom research; meanwhile, university researchers take the chance to get close to schools and classroom realities so as to deepen their understanding of the work of teachers and develop strategies to support teachers to adapt to the changes demanded by the curriculum reform.

In the traditional researcher-practitioner interrelationship, owing to differences in social status, resources available, and the different nature of their work, university researchers tend to take a superior role. Thus, the collaboration between the two parties bears the characteristics of "expert model", in which researchers function as theory producer, taking the initiative while STs act as passive theory consumers. However, educational AR, in accordance with the underlying principles of

curriculum reform, aims at cultivating STs' autonomy in scrutinizing their own teaching. STs are supposed to take a major role in the university- school collaborative AR with the university researchers playing an enabling or supporting role. Therefore, how to break through the stereotypical researcher-practitioner relationship and build an equal and reciprocal relationship among participants in conducting university-school collaborative AR is the main focus of this paper.

This study is based on a university-school collaborative AR project carried out during Nov, 2009 - Nov, 2011 between 17 university researchers (URs) from a teachers' university and 45 senior high school English teachers in China. The purpose of this study is to probe into how URs collaborate with STs in this project, concentrating on URs' roles and their professional growth through the collaboration with STs. It is hoped that the study will uncover the nature of such collaboration which will lead to some actionable suggestions on how to establish a sound university-school collaborative research body that promotes the professional development of both parties.

Related research

Many scholars have discussed the significance of university school collaboration with regard to its impacts on participants involved. For one thing, such collaboration provides teachers with different perspectives of analyzing teaching practice, contributing to improvement in teaching efficiency as well as clearer understanding of teaching and education (Lisa, 1984). As collaboration is characteristic of equality and mutual responsibility, teachers are empowered in the process so that their self-esteem is enhanced and their status is evaluated (Catelli, Padovano & Costello, 2000). For another, university researchers gain the precious chance to get close to the realities of the classroom, which provides abundant first-hand information that benefit them for collaboratively generating educational theories and developing practical solutions to improve practice.

Several models of relationship between URs and STs in collaboration have been discussed by different scholars. According to Townsend and Day (2007), three types of relationship exist among participants,

namely, the supervisory/mentoring relationship, provider-led relationship and co-research relationship. Besides, based on different goals of collaboration, Day (1998) proposes another way of classification: ideological collaboration, in which researchers try to strengthen teachers' professional identity through collaboration with the hope to give theory-hungry teachers new research-based perspectives on their practice; knowledge-generating collaboration, which attempts to guide teachers in examining their practice and construct their own practical knowledge about teaching and education; and capacity-building, which tries to build up STs' confidence and capacity through the long-term interaction with university researchers. Moreover, Biott and Nias (1992) discuss two models of university-school collaborative research based on the status of participants in collaboration: one is implementation model or researcher-focus model, in which researchers impart theories to teachers through lectures or seminars with STs as merely knowledge consumers. The major interactive strategies used in this model are offering, coaching and demonstration; the other one is development model or interactive model, in which participants acknowledge expertise of both parties. In this model, the central role of STs is emphasized and the main interactive strategies implemented in this model are questioning, consulting and discussion. Researchers work together with teachers during the process of identifying teaching problems and working on finding out solutions and providing necessary interpretations.

Although some research has been conducted regarding university-school collaboration, most of them explore the significance or influencing factors of such collaborations on STs. Very few studies have been conducted from the perspective of university participants in the collaboration. It is thus the main focus of the present study.

Research design

Research questions

Two research questions are proposed for this study:

(1)What roles did URs play in collaboration with STs in the AR project?

(2)What gains did URs get by collaborating with STs from the collaborative AR project?

Research method

This study takes a qualitative approach, which allows us to obtain data in a natural setting and gain interpretive understanding of the roles played by the university researchers and their gains during their collaboration with STs.

Setting

This study is based on a project named "Promoting English teachers' educational innovation for the development of students' English language competence - a university-school collaborative AR" led by the Centre for Foreign Language Education and Teacher Education (CFLETE) in a leading teachers' university in China. The aim of the project is to help develop teacher researchers, improve students' language competence and promote English curriculum reform in basic education.

The project team is made up of three participatory parties: 17 university researchers from CFLTTE of BNU, working as project facilitators; 3 English language teaching and research officers from the Teacher Training School of a local district of Beijing, working as administrative supporters, and a group of 45 senior high school English teachers from 17 schools of a local district. STs are further subdivided into 12 sub-groups based on the principle that teachers from the same school stay as much as possible as one sub-group. However, there are a few cases where the groups are formed with members from a combination of two or more schools. As a result, each of the 12 sub-groups consists of an average of 4 to 9 members, who work together with 1 to 2 university researchers. Due to a number of reasons, such as illness, family pressure, and workload, 11 teachers dropped out and there was a re-grouping of the sub-groups in the middle of the project and 10 groups were kept after the re-grouping.

This project lasts for nearly two years. Throughout the process, the project team organized plenary training sessions including workshops and seminars. Individual URs paid school visits, observed lessons, held discussion with their collaborating STs about their research topics. URs also communicated with STs via e-mails, telephones, and blogs during the time when STs carried out their AR projects in their own classroom

following the steps of identifying research questions; conducting preliminary investigation and restating research questions; making action plans; implementing action plans and collecting data; making adjustments and reflecting on their experiences; and writing up AR reports.

Participants

This study focuses on URs from CFLTTE of BNU. Among the 17 members, 6 are academic faculties from the School of Foreign Languages and Literatures of BNU, and 8 are PhD students and the rest MA students.

14 out of 17 university researchers (URs) participated in for this study. The three that did not participate was because they did not respond to the questionnaires nor did they participate in the interviews when data was collected based a voluntary basis.

Data collection methods

Data collected includes participant observations, questionnaires, interviews, participants' reflective journals after each project meeting and documents from e-mails.

Participant observations: In this study, the authors observed the whole project as participants. Field notes were taken and a recording pen was used to record each project meeting and preparatory meetings held among the 17 URs in advance of each project meeting.

Questionnaires: Two questionnaires consisted of mainly open-ended questions were administered to URs, a pre-project questionnaire and a post-project questionnaire (see Appendix I & II). The former intends to find out before the project the participants' perceptions of AR and their expectations of the collaboration. The latter was conducted half way through the project in order to discover URs' understanding of their roles as well as gains in the process of collaborating with STs.

Interviews: To get a clearer understanding of URs' roles and professional learning through collaboration, one in-depth interview was used towards the end of the project. Altogether, ten participants were interviewed with each from a different sub-group. An interview outline in Chinese was designed with the aim of discovering how researchers

perceived and played their roles in the collaboration (see Appendix III). All the interviews were conducted in Chinese out of the consideration that the interviewees could express their views more at ease. With permission, all the interviews were recorded and the interviewees' non-verbal behaviors were noted down.

Reflective Journal: After each project activity, URs were invited to write a reflective journal with the purpose of keeping record of their thoughts, actions and discoveries while collaborating with STs. No fixed pattern or required content were set for them and they were encouraged to write freely about their collaborative experiences and individual thoughts. As reflective journals were written and shared on a voluntary basis, 9 out of 17 URs managed to keep reflective journals on a regular basis. Altogether 81 pieces were collected. Almost all reflections were written in Chinese which were later translated into English as necessary.

The following table shows the information of the data collected for the study.

Table 1
Information of the data collected

Type of data	**Amount of data**
Questionnaire I (Pre-project)	12 URs' responses
Questionnaire II (Mid-project)	11 URs' responses
Interview (End of the project)	Interviews with 10 URs (421 minutes in total)
Refective journals (Throughout the project)	81 pieces of journals
Participant observations (Throughout the project)	Notes of 10 project activities Observation notes of 9

Data analysis methods

Both quantitative and qualitative data in various forms were analysed with appropriate methods. First, the interviews and all the tape-recorded

URs' project meetings were transcribed. Content analysis was used and themes were identified through coding and then codes were identified before core categories were generalized (Chen, 2000). The qualitative data from the open responses to the questionnaires were analyzed in the same manner. Field notes were used to help transcribe the recording and analyze the transcription. Then, the authors read the transcripts carefully to allow themes to emerge to enable the authors to find out what roles URs played in the collaborative project and the impacts of such collaboration on URs.

The reflective journals, 81 pieces in total by 9 URs, were analysed using both inductive and deductive methods.

Data presentation and discussion

In this section, data is presented and analyzed in two parts based on the research questions of this study. The first part reports data regarding the URs' roles in the collaborative AR project with STs. The second part provides a detailed analysis on URs' learning and changes by participating in the project.

URs' roles in the collaborative project

Data collected shows that in the two-year collaborative AR project, URs played a number of roles along with the project and they played certain prominent roles at different stages of the project. These roles included instructor and expert for AR at the introductory stage; facilitator, supporter, and resources provider during the planning stage; observer, listener, and learner during the implementation stage; and pusher and affective carer during the data analysis and evaluation stage, and finally editor and co-writer of AR papers towards the end of the project. At the same time, URs' attitudes towards STs and understanding of STs' work changed as they gained more knowledge about STs and their teaching contexts. The following reports the main findings related to the roles URs played and what they have learned during the process of the collaboration.

Instructors and experts of AR at the initial stage

Although action research has been introduced to China since 1990s, for most STs, it is an unfamiliar term. According to Stenhouse (1979), action research is a systematic enquiry conducted in scientific ways. It therefore involves conducting research by using appropriate methods for collecting and analyzing data. From this perspective, one needs to have some basic knowledge and skills about how to conduct research. For this reason, URs planned three workshops on introducing AR, including the theories of AR and methods for conducting research, including both qualitative and quantitative approaches. During the workshops, teachers were involved in reflecting on their teaching situations and identifying problems with hands-on activities to experience the process of designing questionnaires, conducting small-scale surveys, analyzing data and reporting the results.

As most of the training workshops were led by URS at the beginning stage of the project, URs maintained an authoritative presence. They emphasized the basic knowledge and skills of research and provided instructions on how to conduct AR. As a result, URs played the roles of an instructor or an expert to teachers while STs functioned as learners who relied on URs' instructions and help. These resulted in an unbalanced weight with regard to the knowledge of AR and discourse between URs and STs. Most of the STs found such training useful and expected URs to be their directors, willing to be told what to do.

> "I got useful guidance from the researcher." (ST-reflection, Nov. 7th, 2009)

> "…The school teachers had a chat with me. One teacher said: 'tell us what to do, we will listen and obey'. Another teacher said: 'what do you want us to do, we will meet your needs'. From the conversation, I can see that school teachers don't know what collaboration means. They regarded themselves as passive actors." (UR3-reflection, Nov. 7th, 2009)

Facilitator, supporters, and resource provider during the problem identification and planning stage

As the project progressed into problem identification and plan-making for each individual action research project by STs, URs found that many STs were eager to solve the problems they encountered in classroom teaching but tended to jump to immediate judgments about the problems they identified in their classroom teaching. They were not good at asking why questions for the problems they had. At this stage, URs functioned as facilitators who developed strategies to invite STs to explain why they considered the problems as problems and reflect on the possible reasons for those problems.

By engaging in reflections and further inquiries into the problems, STs developed more awareness of the problems they faced and learned to analyse the their own assumptions behind the problems. Thus, URs began to adapt their roles from instructors to facilitators and supporters. STs were challenged by URs to explore into their assumptions and beliefs and tried to make sense of what they did and why they did it the way they did so that they were able to make informed decisions for proposing solutions for the problems they had. At this stage, the two parties began to accept each other, and viewed each other from a more equal perspective. URs also found that project meetings became an equal platform for communication not only between URs and STs but also among STs.

> I discussed with the teachers on how to restate their questions and this discussion led to some changes in my views on them. Instead of accepting my ideas or keeping silent, they contributed their own thoughts, which I found both logical and coherent. They even mentioned that they sought for the all-round development of students rather than overemphasis on training on language skills. We need to provide them the opportunity to speak out and help explicit their tacit knowledge instead of forcing them to accept our ideas. (UR-6, reflection, March.16th, 2010)

> After ST-3 shared how she identified and analysed her problems in teaching, ST-5 and ST-6 found it very clear and

> enlightening for them while ST-7 thought that ST-3's research questions could be improved by further narrowing down the topic. I am very pleased that these teachers were learning not only from the researchers but from their fellow teachers. I was eager to join in their discussions (UR-8, reflection, April 20th, 2010).

Another issue came up during this stage was that URs found that teachers, for one reason or another, do not have the habit of reading current theories and related literature on language teaching. Therefore, URs encouraged STs to read research articles related to their specific areas of research questions. To support STs who do not have access to academic journals, URs helped search and download the articles and sent the articles through emails to each sub-project team.

Meanwhile, in each sub-group, URs put in a lot of time and efforts to pay school visits, helping teachers revise their data collection instruments (such as questionnaires, interview schedules), and analyze the data collected. Thus, they changed their roles from instructors to facilitators, supporters, as well as resource providers for teacher research.

Observer, listener and learner during the implementation stage

URs further reduced their intervention into teachers' research as the project moved to the stage of implementation of AR plans. URs took on the roles of an observer, listener, and learner at this stage.

URs observed teachers' actions, listened to teachers' explanations and exchanged ideas with them as equal partners. They began to see themselves not as an expert or a judge to tell STs what is right or not right to do but began to change their views about the teachers and about themselves.

> I remembered from an American TV drama a well-cited statement:"Don't be judgmental." I did not really understand it when I first heard about it. …Now I slowly came to realize that this reflects a kind of a world's view. I am not someone who is up there to tell others what to do and consider myself as an expert who can exert great influence on others. Whether it is in work or in life, we all need to learn to be a

> good listener. To be a good listener is the beginning of a true dialogue. Only by doing so, can we offer help to others as well as to ourselves. (UR-8 reflections, April 26th, 2010)

At this point, URs began to regard collaboration with STs as an opportunity to learn, and to deepen their understanding of teaching and learning. They further understood the difficulties teachers came across in balancing lack of time and heavy workload with their research and became increasingly more impressed by STs' penetrating insights into teaching, deep love for education and ardent care for students' growth.

> The rigid time structure and heavy workload placed teachers under almost unbearable pressure. I understand more why they seemed to lack commitment to the research project. They really cannot manage it in their available time as they virtually have little time available for themselves. I no longer complain about them any more but try to do what I can to help them. (UR-5, Interview, July. 17th, 2010)

> I have a much deeper, and much, much deeper understanding of the nature and reality of STs' work and life. These teachers have deep thinking about teaching and learning. We are in no position to make them think the way we think. We need to respect them and help them with what they can do. (UR-1, Interview, Nov. 27th, 2010)

After hearing the teachers' sharing and reflections at one of the project meetings, UR-5 reflected:

> I was moved by ST-8's persistence in exploring into the unknown world of his own teaching, by ST-24's efforts for learning new things, and also by ST-14's honesty in critically reflecting on his deeply held assumptions. I now understand why ST-8 was nervous when he was giving out the questionnaire to his students. I agree that to do AR, we all need the courage to face our weaknesses. I think we, as researchers, should have the courage to stand in these STs' shoes and help them explore the truth of teaching. (UR-5, reflection, April 26th, 2010)

URs changed their perceptions of teachers from knowledge consumers to thoughtful thinkers. They realized that teachers had their own contextualized knowledge and they needed the opportunity and proper ways to make explicit such knowledge to better understand themselves and their teaching contexts.

Through contacts with STs, URs were gradually convinced that teachers were capable in conducting research with their own efforts, persistence and proper facilitation from URs. The conception that teachers were not suitable for undertaking research was a prejudice against teachers.

Pusher for progress and affective carer at the stage of data analysis and evaluation of results

Towards the end of the collaborative project, when STs moved to data analysis and evaluation of their action plans, some of them experienced time pressure and difficulties in data analysis. As a result, they found it hard to keep up with the pace of the project. In order for STs to keep up with the project, a new role that URs had to take on was to ensure that all STs followed the steps in the project. Thus, URs functioned as "pushers" for progress.

Teachers are busy people. Besides teaching, they also have many other responsibilities at school. As AR required extra time and effort especially for data analysis, teachers needed to struggle hard so as to manage time with their busy schedule. Thus, they need to be "pushed" or reminded of the research tasks to be done at this stage.

However, as STs who were over-loaded with school teaching and family responsibilities, this journey of AR seemed to be a strenuous one. Therefore, on the one hand, URs reminded STs of the research plans that they should follow in order to collect and analyse the data for further research; on the other hand, URs took up a humanistic role, offering STs with both mental support and affective care as friends and listeners. In other words, URs did not simply "push" STs without considering the specific situation they were in. In fact, they provided necessary help and support for data analysis if there was a need identified. The various sub-research projects were progressed and monitored based on the constant negotiation between URs and STs.

The following come from URs' reflections, which indicate URs' better understanding of STs and their working conditions and how URs thought they should help:

> Teachers are facing the burdens that you and I can hardly imagine, and they are in great need of being encouraged otherwise their fragile motives in research will fade away. Be a friend with them and share your thoughts and understanding together. Provide the chances for them to be heard, to talk about their concerns and strategies are things we need to do. (UR-4, interview, Nov. 14th, 2010)

> Teachers are very busy people. They have to sacrifice their spare time to manage the extra work that AR projects have brought to them. The teacher in my group told me that she was struggling to cope with the time pressure. I felt that I should encourage her more and be supportive. So from time to time, I sent text messages to offer help and also to show my support and understanding. (UR-8, interview, Nov.16th, 2010)

URs' care and understanding moved STs and they began to make every effort possible to overcome difficulties and tried to continue carrying on their research projects.

Editor and co-writer of the research report towards the end of the project

As the AR projects moved towards the final stage, all STs were encouraged to write up their research reports. Due to lack of experiences of academic writing, STs found it hard to write such papers. As some of the STs expressed their needs in their reflections below:

> ST-1: I hope researchers can give more directions on how to write papers.
> ST-2: I hope we are given more guidance on paper writing and on how to publish articles.

For this reason, URs organized project workshops for STs to study

published AR reports written by teachers and provided STs with a report framework. At this stage, URs functioned as editors and co-authors who offered help and guidance for STs to write, check, and polish their research papers. In each sub-research group, URs and STs worked together closely improving the structure of the report and clarifying ways of expressions. After several rounds of re-writing, they eventually produced 17 pieces of action research reports.

The gradual adjustments of URs' roles indicated that as URs left the "ivory tower", they had the chance to develop a better understanding of the true agendas of the teachers, their professional contexts, and their ways of pedagogic thinking. Such understanding is valuable in bridging the gap between the academic discourse of research and the teachers' discourse of teaching.

The role adjustment of URs is also a process in which researchers tried to empower STs. URs withdrew their interventions step by step and created opportunities for teachers to pose problems, conduct investigations, seek solutions, construct theories and pursue publications.

URs' learning and changes from the collaborative project

URs repositioned themselves in the process of collaborating with STs, in which their understanding of STs and AR was renewed and enriched. The following section discusses URs' changes in the process of the project based on their reflective journals and interview data.

Deepened understanding of STs and their teaching contexts

URs and STs are inhabited in different castles (Somekh, 1994), and the long-separation has led to gaps between them. As a result, they know very little about each other with sometimes misunderstandings. During the collaboration with STs, URs experienced a process of adjusting their understanding of STs and the work they do.

Understanding teachers' professional world

As URs walked into these teachers' professional worlds, they learned much about the working conditions of STs, realized the multiple roles teachers had to perform, and the various responsibilities they had to take

up. In the following, URs recorded their understanding of STs' life in their reflections.

> I can feel the tension and pressure he bears as a novice teacher. He tried to balance the work from school and the requirement of the project. I can see that his mind and will are with us but his time and energy have to go with the school and students. …I hope I can do something to help relive his heavy pressure. (R1, reflection, March. 16th, 2010)

Getting close to STs' life enabled URs to realize the differences in the two living worlds and the difficulties STs encounter in conducting research. Many teachers were trying hard to seek balance between the heavy workload at school and their involvement in AR. Based on this understanding, URs changed their perceptions of teachers as trainees of the project to social beings bearing multitude roles and responsibilities, who needed to be treated in a more humanistic way.

Getting to know the inner landscape of STs

By walking into teachers' professional worlds, URs also walked into the teachers' inner minds and are able to identify with the teachers.

> This teacher used the metaphor to describe her feelings about being a teacher. She said that teachers were the loom in her thoughts after reading the book 'The Courage to Teach'. For her, the ideal class was something like to weave a net so that you join the knowledge of the students and herself together, in which she held open, hearty and equal discussions with her students and provided her students the chance to develop a new world belonging to themselves. I thought we had the same dream in education (UR-2, interview, Nov. 15th, 2010)

> My eyes became dim while reading the words in one of my collaborating teachers' critical reflections: "I used to put my whole self into teaching. … However, in recent years, I got lost. I complained more about the low academic performance of my students, struggled with the high pressure in job promotions and the unfairness in the educational system". This indeed was my first time to get close to these teachers'

> real thoughts and now I understand the struggle he had for the separation of his heart and body. (UR-7, reflection, June 1st, 2010)

Both UR2 and UR7 were moved by the teachers' deep affection for their students and their hopes for education. URs discovered that STs' inner landscape was colorful and rich, filled with the strong desire to reach out for the students. However, social reality compelled these teachers to go against their will and rendered their teaching lifeless, painful and confused. Facing these controversies, STs needed someone who could listen to them and encourage as well as support them to fight against the complexities.

URs' renewed understanding of AR

As action research is considered as a systematic enquiry conducted in scientific ways (Stenhouse, 1979), it requires adopting rigorous research methods to collect and analyze data. Therefore, at the beginning of the project, much emphasis was given to equipping STs with research methods including both qualitative and quantitative through lectures and workshops led by URs.

However, the workshops and trainings seemed to have had some negative effects on teachers, for such training became quite daunting and intimidating for STs who had little knowledge about those technical terms and procedures. As a result, STs became very much concerned about how to collect and analyse data before they even identified a problem and had a chance to reflect on these problems. One UR wrote in his reflection below:

> According to my observation, the emphasis on research technique training estranges teachers from the deep thinking of their teaching concerns. Teachers are supposed to experience the process of examining their practice and their mind through taking action research rather than the fear and awe academic research methods bring to them. Action research is just a means to achieve professional development of STs and we seemed to confuse means and aim at the beginning of the project. (UR4, reflection, Dec.29th, 2009)

Besides UR4, several other researchers also discovered that too much emphasis on the scientific rigor of AR was not sensible.

URs' understanding of AR was developed during the process of collaborating with STs. Although most of URs had read literature on AR, few of them had ever conducted it in their own teaching practice before, nor had they the experience of collaborating with STs in AR. Therefore, URs' understanding of AR was only based on their previous readings prior to the project. Several researchers claimed their initial understanding of AR in the pre-project questionnaire in the following way:

> Action research is a process in which teachers conduct inquiries into their teaching so as to improve their teaching effectiveness. Teachers need to learn how to find out and solve the problems from the perspective of rigorous and systemic research rather than in a loose way. (R2, response to the pre-project questionnaire, Nov. 10th, 2009)

This understanding of AR adopted a scientific research approach, which emphasized the positivist tradition of research. However, URs experienced the complexity between solving problems and conducting research by being involved in supporting STs to do AR in their practical teaching contexts.

> I used to emphasize the scientific rigor in research, believing that only scientific and systematic procedures lead to reliable research findings. Then, what was the difference between action research and the other forms of academic study? The focus of action research is 'action' or 'research'? If the answer is research, does that mean that it requires a scientific approach in it? If the answer is action, does that mean that we only need to focus on the improvement in teaching practice? (R6, reflection, Dec. 29th, 2009)

UR6's concerns reflected her puzzle about the inconsistence that existed between the reality and her previous perception of AR. She used to attach importance to the scientific rigor of research, but the experience of collaborating with STs made her doubt her prior view and sought to discover answers to the question: Is AR aimed at improving

practice using scientific ways or promoting teachers practice and the understanding of practice. The challenge was how URs could make AR workable for STs.

Similar to UR6, a few other URs also bore similar concerns about how AR should be conducted.

> Two words intertwine in my heart: technique and mind. However, as I know STs better, I realize AR is not aimed at equipping teachers with techniques and skills in conducting research, but providing a research attitude toward their own practice. (R9, reflection, Dec. 29th, 2010)

R9 realized that AR was not only a scientific inquiry but also professional commitment for teachers to achieve sustainable growth by scrutinizing their own practice and mind (Wang, Zhang & Lin, 2010). By collaborating with STs, researchers' understanding of AR was deepened. Only when STs made explicit their beliefs behind their teaching behaviours, can they develop their autonomy to pursue improved practice and sustained professional development. Just as what McNiff (2002) advocates, AR should move beyond the surface structure of method, and look at the deep underlying structure of our values and intentions in living our lives.

Almost all URs reflected that they developed a much better understanding of AR at the end of the project by collaborating with STs in conducting AR.

> Before this project, action research meant merely a research method and I would refer to books to get to know the basic theories and procedures of this method. However, by conducting this collaborative action research with STs, I understood more about it: it was a path heading to teachers' professional growth? It meant the strategies for seeking development in school and innovation in education? It stood for a way to achieve social improvement? Or it led to political emancipation? I believed that, action research was the combination of all of the above. (UR3, reflection, Oct. 26th, 2010)

As we can see, before the project, AR, for UR3, was only an academic term in books, far away from the reality. However, by conducting AR with STs, UR3 acquired multi-faceted understanding of it based on her own experiences. She not only noticed the practical effects of AR as a way to improve practice or achieve school development but also uncovered the significance of AR as a way to achieve social improvement and political liberation. Thus, URs' understanding of AR went beyond the simple technical aspect to a tool for shaping professional autonomy and seeking emancipation.

URs' professional learning from the collaborative project

As URs leave the"ivory tower" and get into the "field", they developed themselves on many fronts from developed strategies for supporting STs, to better interpersonal skills, research skills, and new identification with STs with deep touch in their souls.

Developed strategies for supporting STs in problem identification

Identifying research questions was the starting point for STs to undertake AR. Most people would think that this should not be a problem for STs as they encounter many problems every day in their classroom teaching. However, it was found that URs underestimated the difficulties teachers had in identifying research questions, which lie in the fact that it is hard for STs to pin down specific researchable questions from among so many problems they encounter. They posed their initial research questions as very general ones such as how to raise students' interest in learning English, how to make grammar lessons more effective and how to promote the efficiency of after-class reading. Then they immediately jump to solutions rather than thinking about why these problems existed. Therefore, URs had to strategically guide teachers to explore those deep-rooted assumptions and the basis of their judgment. Some clarifying questions were used, such as 'why does this problem exist?' 'Why does it concern you?' 'What do you expect by conducting research on this issue?' 'Can you explain why it is a problem for you?'. These questions helped STs to comb their thoughts and gradually narrow down their research questions. STs were also encouraged to video-tape their lessons for analysis in order to identify

problems and exploit the beliefs or assumptions behind their teaching behaviours. By doing so, STs were able to identify and describe their research questions. At the same time, URs developed effective strategies to better support STs in identifying the research questions.

Improved in research abilities

URs developed both their research ability and reflection ability in the collaboration with STs. As most of these URs were academic staffs from a university, conducting educational research was their routine work. However, lecturing in the university separated them from the daily work of the teachers, which has resulted in the gap between educational theories and practice. The collaborative AR provided these researchers a precious chance to be involved in the teaching contexts that most teachers worked in to understand what is happening in those contexts and how they would make sense of the contexts and help to solve the problems arise from the contexts.

Only when we are in schools with teachers, can we experience the professional lives and working conditions of STs - the colorfulness as well as complexities of school education. I am more aware of the internal logistics, organizing structures, and functions of school education. (UR9, reflection, April. 20th, 2010)

Similar to UR9, several other URs also claimed the importance of gaining first-hand information of basic education and found it a good way to broaden their educational research visions. Getting into classrooms and sharing with teachers helped to bridge the gap between knowledge production and knowledge consuming. What is also important is that they helped inject the living elements into researchers' research agendas and initiatives.

In addition, several URs recalled their own learning of research techniques through the project. In order to provide necessary support for teachers to conduct AR, URs usually needed to make abundant preparations first. Just as what R8 commented in his reflection:

> Before doing the workshop on how to design a questionnaire and how to analyze data using SPSS, I had to read several research method books. By reading these books, I learnt much more about the specific techniques for analyzing data.

> The workshops for teachers provided a chance for me to improve myself. (UR8, reflection, Dec, 29th. 2009)

Improved reflective ability was found among many other researchers by an analysis of their reflection. The themes of their reflections stepped out of the superficial level of describing the relationship of participants in collaboration, to discovering the influencing factors of collaboration and AR, and at last to pondering over the nature and significance of collaborative AR as well as the social and political function of collaborative AR.

Deep movement in the soul

The collaboration with STs not only brought changes to URs' improvement in their research and reflective abilities, but also resulted in deep movement in their souls. Researchers experienced the process of facing themselves, discovering themselves and pursuing self integrity.

It is always hard to subject oneself for scrutinizing. It is even harder for URs, being socially acknowledged as experts, to exploit the inner terrain of themselves. However, inspired by STs, several URs began to explore and de-construct their inner selves.

> I was moved by STs' sharing after reading the book "The Courage to Teach". Although with rich experiences in teaching, these STs experienced "horror" in their work. But they were brave enough to face the horrors today and tried to transcend these horrors. It was their intrinsic professional spirit that encourages them to explore themselves. As a teacher educator, I also met with difficulties and horrors in my professional life, but I have always tried to hide them. Such cowadness and timidity could only cover the problems rather than solving them. I know now that I need to face myself, explore myself, and seek for self development. (UR-3, reflection, March. 16th, 2010)

UR-3 used to cover herself under the clothes of 'expert' and dared not reveal the flaws in herself. However, inspired by STs who exposed themselves while pursuing professionalism, she obtained the courage to examine herself. Just like what Palmer has ever claimed that the more

familiar we are with our inner terrain, the more surefooted our teaching and living becomes (Palmer, 1998).

The collaboration with STs not only stimulated URs to open their heart for scrutiny, but also aroused their inner belief and philosophy so as to urge them to strive for their ideal.

> I used to doubt about whether some of those educational dreams could be realized in real life: life is education and curriculum comes from life. Although I ever believed in those lofty ideals, I gradually doubted their feasibility and believed that they just belonged to "the ivory tower". However, the words in STs' reflections told me that these dreams could be achieved in real situations. I could see that this teacher was struggling in integrating himself, his students, his teaching and his life as a whole through open-heart communication with his students. I was moved just because these words touched my heart and I know that I needed to persist in my conviction and be firm to hold on my dreams. (UR-3, reflection, June. 1st, 2010)

UR-3 regained her inner beliefs in education and life. She developed her identity as educators, as an advocator and executor of educational ideals. However, succumbing to the pressure in reality, some researchers stepped back on their previous beliefs. It was these STs who aroused researchers' inner selves. Researchers regained their desire to seek for the connection between the body and soul (Palmer, 1998).

By exploring the inner mind of two parties, researchers discovered that both teachers and researchers in the collaboration shared the same educational belief, which were the fundamentals for true connections between them. Just like what R7 discovered in her reading of teachers' reflection:

> The voice that 'education is life' not only exists in the 'ivory tower', but also among teachers working in primary and secondary schools. Teachers prefer to use their mind to communicate with their students and facilitate their development. And this has been what we teacher educators are pursuing for. We are in the same boat. (UR-7, reflection, June. 1st, 2010)

URs and STs shared the same educational beliefs, which integrate them together. This collaboration relieved the isolation participants felt and also provided the power of pursuing for the mutual ideals.

Conclusion

This university-school collaborative AR project has provided a precious opportunity for the two long-separated parties of URs and STs to get connected. Firstly, as URs adjusted and added their roles along with the project, the relationship between URs and STs turned from trainer-trainees to cooperation and ultimately collaboration. URs were no longer the superior "legislators" (Lu & Cao, 2003), while STs also got ride of the traditional role of "executors" or "data providers" (Wagner, 1997). URs and STs became co-decision-makers and practitioners, who seek professional growth through AR. Equity was gradually achieved and mutual interests were met in this process.

Secondly, with this collaborative project, URs not only supported and helped STs to improve their practice by conducting AR, but also gained a great deal of professional learning. They developed a more holistic view about school teachers and their teaching contexts. At the same time, URs developed their inter-personal skills, communication skills, research skills, and writing skills along with the project.

Thirdly, a collaborative learning community was established progressively as a result of this project. With their common educational ideals, URs and STs built up a true link between the two parties. For a long time, due to heavy work-load and other pressures, neither parties had the chance and energy to explore their own inner worlds and reflect on the assumptions and beliefs they held before. However, the equal and sincere relationship established in the collaboration enabled both parties to examine their inner landscape, and explore their tacit beliefs and ideals about life and education. Through the channel of communication created by the collaborative project, each party found in the other the deeply held affections for education, for students, and for their desire to improve education.

Several implications can be drawn from the current study for URs, STs and educational administrators. First, the findings suggests that URs

should be encouraged to initiate such kind of collaborations with schools, so that researchers can keep close contact with schools and offer necessary support. They need to adjust their roles to meet the needs of the teachers and take the opportunity to learn from teachers and their practices. Meanwhile, URs need to control the degree of intervention into teachers' research, for teachers' independence in conducting research should be attached with great importance. Finally, the collaboration with teachers should not be reduced to the technical level. A true collaboration can contribute a great deal to the professional growth of both parties.

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Appendix I Pre-project questionnaire for university researchers

Dear Members,
Thank you for your cooperation in completing this questionnaire, which aims at gaining your understanding of the current collaborative action research project before you step in. Please read all the items below carefully and respond based on your own views. We will treat your personal information with complete confidence.
Thank you again for the time you to spend in giving each issue your thoughts and attention!

1. By what means do you come to know action research?
   A: Participating in research project
   B: Reading
   C: Lecturing
   D: Others_____

2. What do you think is the significance of conducting action research?

3. Why do you choose to take part in this project? What are you expectations?

4. What is the significance of conducting collaborative action research among university researchers and teachers from basic education?

5. What role do you expect to play in this collaborative action research with STs?

6. What are the influencing factors for the collaboration between university researchers and STs?

Appendix II Mid-term questionnaire for university researchers

Dear Members,
Thank you for your cooperation in completing this questionnaire, which aims at finding out how you have collaborated with STs in this collaborative action research project so far. Please read all the items below carefully and respond based on your own views. We will treat your personal information in complete confidence.
Thank you again for the time you and for giving each issue your thoughts and attention!

1. By what means have you been communicating with STs in this collaborative action research?
   A: School visits
   B: Classroom observation
   C: Participating in project activities
   D: E-mails
   E: Phones and text messages
   F: Others_____
2. Among the above means, which is the most effective? And why?
3. What roles have you played working together with STs?
4. In the process of conducting collaborative action research, have you perceived any changes in your attitudes, understanding, abilities, etc.?
5. What are the challenges you have met in this collaboration? What are the possible reasons?
6. What are your plans for the next stage of this collaborative research? Do you have any suggestions for other members of the project?

Appendix III Interview Outline

1. Please describe how you have worked with STs in your group? Is it a smooth and nice collaboration?
2. What roles do you think you have played in working with STs?
3. Have you been influenced by the collaboration with STs?
4. Please make comments on your collaboration with STs.
5. What do you think are the factors for an effective collaboration with STs?

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Availability of Supportive Facilities for Effective Teaching

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Availability of Supportive Facilities for Effective Teaching

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Abstract

Work environment of teachers has been identified by many researchers as one of the key propensity for quality teaching. Teaching will be effective when all necessary accoutrements are available and put into practical utilisation. Unlike the private schools, there has been a continues sentiments that, most government Junior High schools in Ghana do not perform satisfactorily during the Basic Education Certificate Examination (B.E.C.E) due to the lack of conducive working environment. As majority of Ghanaian pupils' school in this sector of education, hence this argument is wealthy of investigation. Therefore the purpose of this study is to identify the availability and the adequacy of certain necessary school facilities within the environment of Junior High Schools in the New Juaben Municipality, Eastern Region of Ghana. Questionnaire was used to collect data from two hundred (200) teachers who were selected from twenty (20) Junior High Schools in the New Juaben Municipality. The results reveal that facilities like furniture for pupil, urinal and toilet facilities and classroom blocks, were available but not adequate. However, computer laboratories, library books, staff common room and teachers' accommodation were unavailable. Practical Implications of these results are been discussed.

Keywords: work environment, teaching, Junior High Schools, teachers

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Disponibilidad de Recursos de Apoyo para una Enseñanza Efectiva

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Resumen

El ambiente de trabajo del profesorado ha sido identificado por muchos investigadores como uno de los factores clave de la calidad de la enseñanza. La enseñanza será efectiva cuando todos los accesorios necesarios estén disponibles para poner en práctica su uso. A diferencia de las escuelas privadas, existe la percepción continuada que la mayoría del alumnado de los Institutos de Secundaria públicos en Ghana no alcanzan satisfactoriamente El Certificado de Examen de Educación Básica (B.E.C.E) debido a la falta de entornos facilitadores de trabajo. Este es un buen propósito de estudio debido a que, en Ghana, la majoria del alumnado se encuentra en escuelas públicas. En esta línea, el propósito de este estudio es identificar la disponibilidad y adequación de ciertas infrastructuras escolares necesarias en el contexto de los Institutos de Secundaria del municipio de New Juaben, en la zona Este de Ghana. Para ello, se pasaron cuestionarios que fueron usados para recoger los datos de doscientos profesores seleccionados entre dichos Institutos. Los resultados rebelan como el mobiliario por alumno/a, retrete o clases que estaban disponibles no eran adecuados. Tampoco existía disponibilidad de laboratorios de ordenadores, bibliotecas o salas del profesorado. Finalmente, se presentarán también las implicaciones prácticas que conllevan estos resultados.

Palabras claves: entorno de trabajo, enseñanza, institutos de educación secundaria, profesorado

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Quality education is paramount to National Development. In view of this, the international agencies and Governments including the Government of Ghana agreed that, in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and Education (MDG) over the next decade, there is a need to develop strategies that will remove the barriers to attain quality education (UNESCO, 2003 as cited in Hayford, 2007). In Ghana, quality education is not an issue for Government alone, but parents are also committed to the MDG 2 educational goals by investing heavily into the education of their children. For instance, it is worth noting that, most junior and senior high schools in Ghana have Parents Teacher Association (PTA) where parents make contributions to help build and maintain schools of their children. On the part of Government, 31% of the national budget is spent on education. Out of this huge budget for the Educational Sector, about 90% goes into the remuneration of teachers and other supportive staff (Sedem, 2011).

Several interventions such as the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), Capitation Grant, School Feeding Programme, free exercise books and school uniforms have been implemented to ensure quality education. However, there have been differential educational achievements of students in Ghana, with a good number of them performing abysmally in all national assessments. The most recent is the case of poor performance in the 2011 BECE results, where out of the 375,280 students who sat for the 2011 examination, only 176,128 passed their examinations with the fate of 199,152 students now doomed to a grim future of uncertainties (Asare, 2012). It is not only unacceptable, but also unjustifiable for such heavy investment made by parents and government to yield poor results. Although the situation is often blamed on several stakeholders in education, the teachers' performance is placed at the centre of the blame game. On the 28 September 2011, the Ghana News Agency (GNA) reported the Deputy Upper East Regional Minister, Mrs. Lucy Awuni to had questioned the performance of teachers in the region as having contributed immensely to the poor performance of students in the 2011 Basic Education

Certificate Examination (BECE) (GNA, 2011). Also in the same region, The District Chief Executive (DCE) for the East Gonja District, Alhassan Mumuni descended heavily on teachers in the district, especially professional teachers, for unjustifiably contributing to the poor performance of student in the district.

Although Agyeman (1993) emphasizes academic and professional qualification of teachers as key factors to successful teaching performance, he further stated that 'a teacher who is academically and professionally qualified, but work under unfavourable conditions of service would be less dedicated to his work which would amount to less productivity than a teacher who is unqualified but work under favourable conditions of service' (cited in Suleman et al., 2012). This means that hiring qualified teachers alone does not warrant quality teaching but providing conducive environment in addition is the key.

Theoretical framework

Conducive/Favourable Work Environment

Work environment is the totality of conditions under which a person or a group of people work or perform their duties (Akporehe, 2011), In her research paper entitled 'The Impact of Environment on Productivity in Secondary Schools', Akporehe asserted that, work environment can be in the form of physical environment, human environment and relationship with colleagues, administrators, interaction within the system and the general quality of the work climate. Physical work environment, she said include school building, staff offices, staff residential accommodation, laboratories, libraries, workshops, places of convenience for staff and pupil recreational facilities, canteens for students and many others. According to Akporehe (2011), the human environment has to do with the relationship with colleagues, administrators or school as well as staff of the directorates at district, regional and national levels. How supervisors interact with heads and teachers of schools, the relationship and interaction of community level stakeholders such as the Parent and Teachers Association (PTA), the School Management Committee (SME), Traditional and Political leaders also come into play to form the human environment in which the teacher works. According to Ukeje (1990), as referenced in Akpohere

(2011), organizational climate is related to job satisfaction in terms of interpersonal relationship, group cohesiveness and task involvement teachers' condition of service – remuneration, promotion, professional development policies for teachers and general availability of tools needed to perform their jobs. Drawing inference from the definitions of work environment by Akpohere (2011) and Ukeje (1990), it is evidenced that the less presence of one or more of the forms of work environment is an indication of poor work environment.

The concept of good teaching environment

To address the falling quality of the present day education, it is wholesome to agreed that, prominence should be given to the elements of the school's work environment (Adesina, 1983 cited in Ajayi et al., 2011). This, he said would create an attractive intellectual atmosphere which would foster positive attitude towards teaching and learning. Adaralegbe (1983) and Akuegwu (2005) ascertained that, without a good socio-psychological, physical and intellectual environment, teachers and students cannot perform well in their academic activities; that is, if the work environment is poor or unconducive it may have a negative effect on the academic performance of the students (cited in Ajayi et al., 2011).

Adesina (1995) asserted that, "quality work life affects human activities in all its visceral beyond mere basic needs". A school of scholars who adopted the resource based approach to the study of organisational structure believed that, the quantum of resources in a given organization is a major factor in explaining quality of employees work life (Emerson, 1962; Preffer, 1972a, 1972b; Aiken and Hage, 1968; Rus, 1978 cited in Ajayi et al., 2011). By their assertions Emerson, Preffer, Aiken and Hage and Rus meant that, the resources needed by teachers must not only be available but also should be sufficient and in good working condition for them to attain job satisfaction. According to Akporehe (2011), judging from poor work environment of the Nigerian school teachers, all the objectives set in the National Educational Policy of Nigeria are hardly achievable. Akporehe further asserted that, the presence of the physical environment which includes school building, staff offices, laboratories, libraries, place of conveniences for staff and pupil's, recreational facilities and others may

have a positive influence on teacher's attitude towards their jobs. Thus in a situation where this facilities are in poor state or not available, the teachers' morale is low and their level of commitment is very minimal

According to Akporehe (2011) lack of adequate motivation has negative effects on staff performance. Teachers will work hard and show high level of commitment when they are adequately motivated. Studies by Lockheed et al. (1991) also indicated that lack of motivation and professional commitment produce poor attendance and unprofessional attitudes towards students which in turn affect the performance of students academically (cited in Okyerefo M.P.K et al. 2011). Motivation according to Odor (1995), is the force or condition propels an individual to work towards the progress of the organization (Nakpodia, 2011). Human beings generally require some sort of internal and external drives such as incentives, encouragement and satisfaction of basic needs to get the best from them towards the accomplishment of group goals and objectives. Nwachukwu (1992) as cited in Akporehe (2011) also defines motivation as 'an energizing force that produces or compels and maintains behaviour.' A good work environment therefore is that kind of environment where staff is highly motivated for hard job and commitment to bring about good job performance. From their definitions, Odor and Nwachukwu meant to say that, a conducive work environment serve as a source of motivation for teachers, compelling them to give off their best on their jobs. The findings of a study conducted by Agyeman (1993) appear to be buttressing the assertions of Odor and Nwachukwu. Agyeman state that 'regardless of the academic and professional qualification of teachers and their level of commitment, if the necessary resources are not provided by stakeholders, the teaching staff cannot perform, no matter how much they are induced. Opatolu (1995) also found experience, conducive work environment, and possession of teaching qualification, disposition, and interest in the job, dedication and commitment, among others, to be most important in academic staff job performance (cited in Ajayi et al., 2011). Churchill (1965) also found a positive relationship between the location of a school and the student and teacher performance (cited in Etsey, 2005). Verdugo et al. (1997) emphasizes that 'if quality schooling is the goal, the focus should be on developing an organizational climate that permits teachers to perform their duties in a professional and

autonomous manner (cited in Mhozya, 2007).

Although several literatures point to the fact that favourable work environment is a requirement for teachers' performance, it is importantnot to forget about the role of the professional competence of teachers who desire such favourable work environment. Anderson and Dyke (1972) asserted that 'the cornerstone of good education in any school is its faculty (teachers); fine buildings and equipment, special services and all other factors which help to provide favourable environment. For learning mean little, if the learning experiences are directed by incompetent teachers'(cited in Akporehe, 2011). Neagley and Evans (1970) and Etsey, Amedahe and Edjah (2004) also see supervision as a key environmental factor in the workplace which affects the performance of teachers. They all view effective supervision of teachers as a major factor contributing to teachers' performance (cited in Suleman et al., 2012). Powerful synergic effect of professionally competent teachers, favourable work environment and effective supervision of teachers' work and several other factors come into play in ensuring performance of teachers.

Factors that influence teaching

Review of several literatures in the preceding sections have established a positive link between conducive work environment and teachers' performance which eventually translate to become students' performance. According to a report by the Operations Evaluation Department (OED) of the World Bank (2004) on 'Books, Buildings and Learning Outcomes', school quality can be measured by four different inputs i.e., material inputs such as chalk and textbooks; physical inputs such as classrooms and blackboards; teachers and school management were identified as four key factors in the school environment which facilitate educational outcome through teachers' performance. Also, Harbison and Hanushek (1992) were reported in The World Bank's OED (2004) report to have categorised educational inputs into:

i. "Hardware" such as school buildings, classrooms and furniture, sanitation, etc.
ii. "Software" such as curriculum, pedagogy, textbooks, writing materials, teaching and learning materials, etc.

iii. Teachers.
iv. Management and institutional structure and
v. Context and background variables such as student academicability, family and community background, etc.

Physical (Hardware) Input

The various reports referenced in this write up have shown the importance of school buildings and other infrastructural facilities to teachers' performance. A comprehensive case study conducted by White (2004) as referenced in OED of the World Bank (2004) report offers specific evidence that, a minimum basic quality of school facilities matters significantly towards the achievement of higher teachers' performance. For instance, in certain parts of Ghana, schools often close due to roof leakage (White, 2004). Similarly, it was reported that in 1988 less than half of schools could use all their classrooms during rainfall (OED of The World Bank, 2004). According to Berry (2002), schools manifest common traits including availability of sanitary facilities such as water, toilets, urinals etc; safety of school buildings such as walls without cracks; adequate indoor and outdoor recreational grounds, proper lighting system in classrooms and libraries etc. Harbison and Hanushek (1992) made mention of furniture such as teachers' chair and table, student's desks, classroom cupboards as 'hardware inputs which teachers cannot do without. Cash (1993) as referenced in Brendle-Corum (2010) mentioned furniture and other hardware inputs as comfort factors in school environment that influence student's performance.

A study conducted by Churchill (1965) found a positive relationship between the location of a school, the students and teachers performance. Earthman and Lemasters (1998) posit that, students' perform well in schools that have less external noise. Hence excessive external noise causes stress in students which leads to class dissatisfaction and truancy (cited in Schneider, 2002). This means that, teachers would have to strain their voices in order to make whatever they are saying audible to students. These problems are more acute for children who may have hearing impediments (Nelson and Soli 2000 cited in Schneider, 2002). A study conducted by Fisher (2000) also supports the assertion that, higher noise level around classrooms causes stress to students.

Class size

Podmore (1998) as referenced in Cakmak (2009) stated that, there is a relationship between class size and children's achievement, children's motivation, teacher satisfaction, teacher stress, and the organization. Class size is an important factor in a school design, as it drives facility-related issues that are part and parcel of the school building plan, construction, cost, maintenance, and operational plan (Schneider, 2004). According to Cakmak (2009), classes might be small or large in size but in both cases, it is expected that teachers should teach effectively by having students' interests and learning experience in mind. The definition of a "small" or a "large" classroom might differ in contexts (Cakmak, 2009). Hargreaves, Galton, and Pell (1998) as referenced in Cakmak (2009), for instance indicated that, there is little agreement about the optimal size of a class. According to Croll and Hastings (1996), as reference in Cakmak (2009), class size effects cannot be just a matter of the number of children in a class. The number of children must have an effect on other classroom processes and activities which has an effect on learning. Thus a reduced number of teacher- student ratio would promote quality teaching. The reflective journals, 81 pieces in total by 9 URs, were analysed using both inductive and deductive methods.

Methodology

The respondents

The respondents for this study were teachers from the Government Junior High Schools in the New Juaben Municipality, Eastern Region of Ghana. The researcher's decision to focus on Junior High Schools is justified by the fact that, this level is the first level in Ghana's educational system where standard form of assessment of students' performance is made at the end of the period of study. It is the point where progression to the next level is based on a well-structured, standard and internationally recognized examination. It is also the point where the performance of students can be easily ascertained. There are seventy-three (73) Junior High schools in the municipality, which have about 500 teachers. Simple random sampling technique was used to choose two hundred (250) respondents (teachers) from 40 selected

Junior High Schools in the New Juaben Municipality.

Data analysis and results

Two hundred and fifty questionnaires were distributed to the respondents and only two hundred were returned within two weeks, which represents 80% of the total response rate. Of the 200 respondents, 56 percent of them were males. Majority of the respondents were in the 20 to 30 years old range. Regarding academic qualification, 40.5 percent were Diploma holders, 12 percent were Certificate "A" holders, 35 percent were Bachelor degree holders, 2.5 percent were Masters degree holders and the remaining 10 percent hold other qualifications such as "Peoples teacher". Finally, on the length of service, about 25 percent have served 1-2 years, 30 percent 2-3 years, 30 percent 4-6 years and 15 percent 7 years and above. It is important to note that, data was collected from 200 teachers from 40 Junior High Schools in the New Juaben Municipal Assemble.

Results

A descriptive technique was used for testing of the variables. Table1 shows that, 42.5% of the respondents are in schools that have available and adequate classroom blocks. Forty-nine (49.0%) of the respondents are in schools that have available classroom blocks inadequate to meet up the number of students. Whiles schools representing 8.5% have their classroom blocks in a deplorable state. Classroom block is of great essence when effective teaching and learning can be achieved. Within the municipality, 17 schools has adequate classrooms; 20 schools had inadequate classroom block; and 3 schools have this facility but in a poor state. This leads to schools resorting to the shift system whiles others in their quest manage this issues end up having large classes. Due to this teachers wouldn't be able to give off their best.3 schools also have this facility available but in a poor state.

Table 1
Availability of Classroom Blocks

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Available	85	42.5	42.5
Available but inadequate	98	49.0	91.5
Available but in poor state	17	8.5	100
Total	200	100	100

From table 2, 4.0% of the respondents are in the schools that have well furnished staff common room. Forty two (42.0%) of the respondents are in schools that have staff common rooms but inadequate to meet the number of teachers employed in the schools. Schools representing 18.5% have this facility available but cannot be used. Whiles schools representing 35.5% don't have this facility at all. From the above table, it can be deduced that more teachers carried out their activities (i.e., preparing notes, marking papers, etc) in non-teaching places. This led to some teachers resorting to sitting under tree's, outside the classrooms.

Table 2
Furnished staff common room

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Available	8	4.0	4.0
Available but inadequate	84	42.0	46.0
Available but in poor state	37	18.5	64.5
Not Available	71	35.5	100
Total	200	100	100

The distribution in the table below indicates that 26 schools representing 13.0% have adequate library. Schools representing 14.0% have library but in deplorable state whiles schools representing 73.0% don't have library stocked with books. Within the municipality majority of the schools don't have libraries. This deficiency in the teaching environment affects the learning and teaching practices.

Table 3
Library stock with books

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Available	26	13.0	13.0
Available but inadequate	28	14.0	27.0
Available but in poor state	146	73.0	100
Total	200	100	100

From Table 4, 23.0% of the respondents are in schools that have urinal and toilet facilities at their disposal. Thirty eight percent (38.5%) of the respondents are in schools that have urinal and toilet but not enough to meet up the number of teachers and pupils found in the school. Twenty three percent (23.5%) of the respondents have these facilities but in a deplorable state. Whiles the remaining 15.0% don't have these facilities at all.

Table 4
Urinal and Toilet for students and teachers

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Available	46	13.0	13.0
Available but inadequate	77	38.5	61.5
Available but in poor state	47	23.5	85.0
Not Available	30	15.0	100
Total	200	100	100

From table 5, 3.0% of the respondents teach in schools that have computer laboratories stocked with computers and accessories. Also 40.5% of the respondents are in schools that have computer laboratories stocked with computers but not enough to meet the students needs. Four percent of the respondents are in schools that 4.0% have computers enough to meet the number of students for such lessons but the computers are in deplorable state. Whiles the remaining 52.5% of the respondents teach in schools that does not have computer laboratory.

Table 5
Computer laboratory

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Available	6	3.0	3.0
Available but inadequate	81	40.5	43.5
Available but in poor state	8	4.0	47.5
Not Available	105	52.5	100
Total	200	100	100

Discussion, recommendation and conclusion

The results of the analysis show that, majority of the respondents teaches in schools that has no classroom blocks or in deplorable state. Also the analysis of Table 2 indicates that, 91.5% of the respondents teach in schools that have no staff common rooms or the common rooms have inadequate space to occupy all the teaching staff. As 35.5% teaches in schools that has no staff common rooms at all. This means that most teachers in these schools may result in having their lessons under trees and pavement on the schools compound. Oshagbemi (1999) pointed out that, physical conditions and facilities are critical elements of job satisfaction (cited in Leung, Chan & Wang, 2006). Teachers use the staff common rooms when preparing teaching materials, assessing homework, executing administrative duties, and making decisions (Darling-Hammond, 2000, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001, 2002 cited in Leung, Chan & Wang, 2006).This findings gives an indication that, only few schools are in the position to meet the needs of their students in terms staff common room. On the other hand, there is a perception that when adequate resources are available to meet work demands, manageability of the job is increased (Nelson & Simmons, 2003).This presupposes that most teachers in the municipality would find it very difficult to manage their jobs which would impede successful teaching performance. Again, as analyzed and presented in table 3, 77% of the respondents teaches in schools that has no urinal and toilets and if they have its in deplorable state. The analysis also shows that, only 13% of the respondents teaches in a schools that has urinal and toilet. As the 77% does not have or have

but its in a deplorable shape. This means that most schools in the municipalities does have a decent and a clean sanitary environment.

Moreover, Table 4 indicates that majority of the respondents' i.e., 52.5% teach in schools that has no computer laboratory as the remaining 48% of the respondents work in schools that have computer laboratory but either in poor state or inadequate.

Analysis in Table 5 shows that, most schools in the municipality have library but either in poor state or the books in the shelves are inadequate.

The findings of this study shows that facilities like furniture for pupil, urinal and toilet facilities and classroom blocks were available but not adequate. However, computer laboratories, library books, staff common room and teachers' accommodation were unavailable and if available its mostly in a deplorable state.

The study recommends that, the Educational Ministry should have a policy in place to ensure the provision of certain amenities like physical staff common rooms, computer laboratories, adequate classroom blocks library and others are in place before license is given. Also, since the work environment is significantly related to job performance, government as well as school administrators should encourage the support of parents, philanthropists and corporate institutions to provide physical input (i.e. physical structures), material input (i.e. teaching and learning material) and other employee benefits for teachers to attain maximum job satisfaction. Moreover, the Capitation grant and other educational fund should be shared equitably for the benefit of all schools in the country.

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Pupil Grouping: Education Agent Interaction Influence on Education Results

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Pupil Grouping: Education Agent Interaction Influence on Education Results

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Abstract

This paper analyses pupil grouping within primary education and its influence on pupils' opportunities to achieve high education results. The author aims to show how pupils' achievements and education interpretation are constructed in classroom interaction, and how such constructs are connected to teacher interpretation of pupils' abilities. The analysis is concerned with micro interaction occurring between the teacher and the pupil. The empirical study is elaborated within the interpretative perspective and based on theories of New Sociology of education and grouping. To obtain data about the questions analyzed interviews with language and mathematics teachers were conducted, followed by interviews with pupils whom the interviewed teachers described as "*high ability*" or "*poor ability*". To analyze the empirical data Critical Discourse Analysis was applied. The results show that both pupils and teachers legitimize pupil grouping and these groups are used to predict pupil performance. It is also possible to conclude that pupils' interpretation of education processes comes from interaction within school. Although there is a link between interaction and pupils' achievements, teachers tend to explain pupil achievements through other factors.

Keywords: education, grouping, schools, class, interaction

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Agrupación del Alumnado: La Influencia de las Interacciones de los Agentes Educativos

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Resumen

Este artículo analiza la agrupación del alumnado en la educación primaria y su influencia en alcanzar resultados educativos elevados. El autor tiene como objetivo señalar los logros del alumnado, como la interpretación educativa se construye en la interacción en el aula y como estas construcciones están conectadas con la interpretación del profesorado de las habilidades del alumnado. El análisis está centrado en la interacción micro que ocurre entre el profesorado y el alumnado. Este estudio empírico está elaborado desde la perspectiva interpretativa y basado en las nuevas teorías sociológicas de la educación. Para la obtención de los datos se llevaron a cabo entrevistas con profesorado de lengua y matemáticas, seguidas de entrevistas con alumnado a los que el profesorado describía como de "*altas capacidades*" o de "*bajas capacidades*". Cabe destacar también que el análisis de los datos empíricos se realizó a través de un Análisis Crítico del Discurso. Los resultados demuestran que ambos, alumnado y profesorado, legitiman una agrupación específica del alumnado que condiciona el rendimiento académico. También es posible concluir que la interpretación sobre los procesos educativos que sigue el alumnado están condicionados por las interacciones que se dan en la escuela. Aunque se dé una relación entre interacción y rendimiento académico; el profesorado tiende a explicar el rendimiento académico a través de otros factores.

Palabras claves: educación, agrupación, escuelas, clases sociales, interacción

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It is common to view the education process in schools, both in public and academic discussions, from a macro perspective. Therefore, discussions regardless of the issue addressed, be it education content, pupil achievements, school organization etc., apply a simplified education system interpretation, based on presumption that by putting in place a *right kind of system organization* one can achieve higher academic results. Such a perspective loses its connection to the context of every specific case which is the main argument for explaining various education praxes.

Yet even such superficial analysis reveals problems and questions within Latvia's education system that beg for a much deeper research. For example, data from the Central Statistical Bureau shows that 9th grade is finished by around 10% less pupils than started to study nine years ago. In study year 2009/2010 around 3% of pupils who graduated primary school did not receive the Certificate of Completion but graduated primary school with a school grade report. In year 2010, 5.3% of primary school graduates decided not to continue their studies in secondary school.

In addition, the situation outlined here does not correspond to the goals that Latvia's policy makers stress, namely, promoting a knowledge-based society and life-long learning, and ensuring education availability (RAPLM, 2006; Saeima, 2010). Thus it is necessary to search for explanations which would allow explaining mismatches in the education system. To ensure full understanding, such explanations shouldn't be limited to a macro perspective.

Within this paper I am addressing pupil-teacher interaction interpretation during education processes. The aim of this study is to analyze how the interpretation of pupils and teachers' mutual interaction is used by both groups to construct knowledge about pupil achievement groups. The research object is primary school pupils, their teachers and both teacher and pupil knowledge about the education process. It means that within this paper I use term "education" to refer to "primary education".

The study is elaborated within the perspective of social construc-

tionism. Education processes are explained through the theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Basil Bernstein, tracking and labeling. Ideas of both authors in this research are used to give explanation on how pupil's belonging to a certain social group influences his abilities to act according to education agent expectations. I am interpreting tracking and labeling as "two sides of the same coin" – both are instruments that give real tools to agents involved in education processes to connect their knowledge on education process with the praxis that promotes specific education results.

During research interviews with Latvian language and Mathematics teachers and teacher recommended pupils were conducted. In total 34 in-depth interview data was gathered. To analyze the empirical material Critical Discourse analysis was used.

Theoretical perspective

To explain my education interpretation I draw from several theories. Here the selection of theories is defined by my interpretation of hierarchical relationship between them. Mutual vertical relations of theories allow me describing education processes top down across the whole range – from macro to mezzo to micro. Similarly theories are selected in a way that enables offering a logical explanation from several theoretically relevant education levels and keeping in under consideration the main education system traits. These education system traits are as follows: (1) the presence of power on all its institutional levels, (2) specific interaction types, (3) high legal/normative regulation level and (4) high ability to extrapolate education results.

Theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Basil Bernstein

One of the best known perspectives on interpreting education has been elaborated by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Quite a similar view on education has been offered by the English education researcher and linguist Basil Bernstein. Both authors lived and developed their theories at the same time. This has encouraged critics to suggest that both theories supplement each other (Collins, 1978; Singh, 2002). Yet, several nuances of theories (some of them pointed out also by authors

themselves (Bourdieu, 1991; Bernstein, 1995) encourages us to make a clear distinction between both approaches.

The ideas proposed by both researchers can be integrated under the statement that education will offer differing opportunities for pupils from various social backgrounds. Achievement diversity shouldn't be explained through the overall level of schooling quality (as some researchers may put it) but as a linkage between the school's internal processes and the interests of the social and cultural elite (Sadovnik, 2007, pp. 9-13). In both cases education represents dialectical relations between the group's ability to legitimate dominant praxes and knowledge and its access to power. As a result dominant groups can define categories which later are used to select individuals which are allowed in dominant groups (Young, 1971, p. 8). Such explanation proposes that, firstly, during the analysis, education shouldn't be separated from the space it is located in. Secondly this shows how the school works as a mechanism for social reproduction.

Ideas just mentioned and conclusions derived allow identifying some additional factors which unites both authors. Both Bourdieu and Bernstein describe pupil's attainment of accepted/ valued knowledge as the main factor that can be used in identifying pupils' high achievement ability. Bourdieu illustrates how school is constructed to strengthen symbolic capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) and how education is used to reproduce culture capital (Bourdieu, 2007). Bernstein shows how linguistic codes are used to promote pupils from certain social groups (Bernstein, 2003a). Selection of classroom code is a result of pedagogic praxis used – it is teacher's interpretation of pupils' abilities and capacities.

In both cases the level of achievement pupils will be able to show depends on the kind of knowledge the school accepts. Such knowledge is selected and legitimated by groups most effectively using symbolic capital. In other words – pupils representing groups that have access to resources influencing education praxis will always achieve higher education results.

Another factor which should be taken into account when talking about education is that the school can create knowledge that later on will be accepted and used as a basis for defining social structure. From the perspective of Bourdieu and Bernstein there is a constant conflict

within society over the authority to determine knowledge what will be taught in schools. For group members, access to education content planning guarantees both higher academic achievements for the group members' children and the possibility to use school to ensure the value of such knowledge. Schools don't merely teach kids a predefined set of knowledge – they demonstrate young people which knowledge is worth knowing. As a result, although most pupils can't achieve high school results they still accept knowledge offered in school as an instrument which can support their status and which can be used to restrict or promote their opportunities in future.

This short description of both theories allows us to understand the praxis which is used to reproduce pupils' academic results. Yet, although these theories give a clearer understanding of how pupil achievements are created, both authors have only partially considered the pupil as an active agent (Karabel & Halsey, 1976). Both theories consider interaction which can emerge between the teacher and the pupil just in a context of accepted knowledge. By doing so the authors ignore an important education agent – the pupil and his interpretation and knowledge about the processes he is operating in. Therefore the question of explaining pupil's achievements still remains a "black box" (ibid).

A problematic part of Bourdieu's and Bernstein's perspective is their proposition that pupils (and maybe teachers as well) act in a system where every meaningful praxis occurring is system-predefined – it's already inscribed in the accepted context and education system. Pupils in such a perspective are just passive objects of symbolic violence who do not have any real tools to influence the situation.

Researchers have tried to correct such determinism. For example Ogbu has concluded that pupils' minority group origins can influence their attitude towards the majority created education system – minority pupils may be unwilling to get involved in the education processes (1992; 1982). Other authors point out several other ways how pupil's interpretations and actions can influence schooling outcomes. Pupils who hold different interpretation about their future opportunities, show different academic achievements (MacLeod, 1987; Willis, 1981). Similarly pupil attainment can influence interaction within the classroom (Hargreaves, 1975), teacher's interpretation of pupils (Rist, 2007), and pedagogy used (Cicourel, 1974), etc. Pupils' academic achievements

can be explained through various factors yet we don't have a clear view of how these factors could be connected. Arguments mentioned can be used to conclude that to answer questions asked we should focus our attention on agents' mutual relations within the class on a micro level.

Tracking

To fully understand education mechanics it is important to define instruments which teachers can use to promote pupil's achievement. Two concepts could be used to deal with this issue – tracking and labeling. Both terms are commonly used in theoretical and empirical research and both are used to explain specific interaction which can occur between pupils and teachers and how this results in pupil attainment. Consequently the introduction of tracking and labeling allows for creating a much more detailed explanation of mutual relations between the educational praxis and the interpretation of education by the involved agents.

Explanations of tracking usually contain some indication of hierarchical structures within school which at some point will promote different access to education resources (Brint, 2006, pp. 211-220). Jeannie Oakes explains that tracking is a process during which pupils are divided in categories that later will be used to appoint them to classes or groups (Oakes, 2002). As an example Oakes offers a distinction which she says is commonly used in schools: classes can be divided in groups of fast, middle and slow learners. Oakes points out that usually this distinction is supported by teachers and school officials because they accept the perspective that teachers will be able to select more appropriate pedagogic praxis if pupils are divided in ability groups (ibid).

Although researchers can't agree on tracking consequences most of them tend to describe it as a negative praxis that should be re-evaluated (Slavin, 1993). Researchers point out that depending on the group or class to which pupils during selection are assigned several education factors change: time spent for education (Oakes, 2002), knowledge taught (Rist, 2007; Oakes, 2002), pupils circle of friends (Hallinan & Sørensen, 1985; Hallinan & Teixeira, 1987), opportunities for further education (Cookson & Persell, 1985) as well as access to some specific

knowledge (Hallinan, 1996), etc. Commonly researchers conclude that more often the consequences will be felt by lower class pupils. This can be explained by the fact, that lower class pupils much more often are tracked into low ability classes (Slavin, 1995). Additionally researchers suggest that considerable differences in average achievements can't be observed between classes were pupils are and aren't tracked. In grouped classes the achievement average stays the same because the dispersion of results grows – pupils who are tracked as high achievers tend to get even higher results while pupils, who are considered to be low achievers fall even lower (Slavin, 1993).

Authors often tend to show tracking as nearly a mechanical process during which the structure of society is reproduced and individuals from lower status groups are significantly limited (Oakes, 1995; 1983; Ogbu, 1992; Hallinan, 1994). Such approach can be easily connected to ideas of Bourdieu and Bernstein that emphasize that cultural capital of lower social groups involves limitations when used to perform tasks associated with upper status groups. Tracking from such perspective represents interpretation of pupil's ability by teachers – evaluation of pupil's ability to learn, acquire knowledge and function according to school rules (Brint, 2006, pp. 211-220). This description connects tracking to labeling.

Labeling

The usage of the term "labeling" offers a critical interpretation of education processes and helps to keep distance from the official view on teacher pupil relations. It means that the concept of labeling allows the researcher to expand the borders of the school, education processes and statuses of involved agents.

The concept of labeling has been introduced into sociology of education by Ray Rist. Rist's definition of core characteristics of labeling fits well with the already given description of tracking where teacher's interpretation of pupil ability comes from predefined ability categories selected by teachers to facilitate their work (Rist, 2007; Wineburg, 1987). As mentioned –if we use the term "tracking" then probably some clear, context meaningful and measurable factors that serve as a basis for grouping will be observable. With labeling we can clearly distinguish praxis results, yet we can't notice the grouping

process- there aren't any public definition why some pupil is described as low achieving. The labeled kid is taught in the same class as other pupils and the teacher may not even notice that his pedagogy and interaction differs from pupil to pupil. Officially labeled pupils don't receive any new status that would support the need of some specific model of interaction. Yet although there hasn't been any official changes within the school or class the teacher chooses to form different interaction and maybe even teach some other knowledge, based on his interpretation of pupils' ability.

The result of labeling is a self-fulfilling prophecy – the pupil starts to fit the expectations that are promoted by the teacher. Teacher-pupil interaction has ensured that the teacher's interpretation of pupil's abilities turns out to be true and everyday observations confirm his expectations (Eder, 1981). Still there was not any real support for the teacher's interpretation to start with, and the only reason why the results correspond to teacher's interpretation is his expectations which have promoted unequal resource distribution within the class. We can associate such point of view with the fact that pupils come to school with their social "luggage" – certain cultural capital that defines ways of how pupil works with knowledge and how he chooses to represent himself. Meanwhile the teacher comes to school with his social experience that is used to create more effective pedagogy.

To give a more precise labeling interpretation I would like to point out some final remarks. Firstly – pupils can be labeled on a wide range of factors. Most commonly labeled characteristics in education are drawn from the space that we could call meaningful context – the space were school is located and were teachers' experience is shaped. Secondly, although a label is attached to every single pupil, at the end the classroom will be filled with wider pupil groups where every pupil may be connected to several labels. Thirdly, all of labels will tend to connect with the ability to explain academic achievements. Fourthly, every characteristic which is labeled will tend to legitimize itself. Legitimization should promote two observable consequences: firstly labeling arguments will tend to connect with socially accepted arguments and secondly within the class (school) there will be a search for ways how to legitimize pupil results.

Methodology

In the previous sections of the paper I showed how interaction within the class can promote specific academic outcomes. Here I argue that to predict pupil's academic abilities various unorganized knowledge from the context is brought into everyday classroom interaction. Integrated knowledge then generates teacher and pupil expectations towards the specific pupil's ability to execute everyday tasks that can be used as a factor to explain his achievements.

Differences that can be observed in teachers' interpretation with regard to various pupils are based both in his pedagogical experience and experience obtained outside of school. Such experience is manifested through everyday pedagogical praxes. The teacher who within the school is in a power position can use the authority accessible to him to promote interaction that would support his general beliefs about pupils' skills and abilities. As a result the pupil interacting with the teacher is forced to accept the role assigned by the teacher.

Teacher's interpretation is based on his knowledge – he uses certain constructions that would legitimate the "truth" of social praxis. This means that the main element conditioning teacher's knowledge and his ability to carry out pedagogic praxis based on this knowledge is language. To supplement and explain this point I should mention that here language functions consist of accumulating knowledge, defining what is possible, conditioning power relations and forming (maintaining) reality. For Bourdieu and Bernstein language also is an instrument that creates borders between groups.

To analyze how pupils are grouped within a classroom 8 interviews with Mathematics and Latvian language teachers of 8th and 9th grade and 26 interviews with pupils were conducted. In total I visited eight schools and in every school one teacher and several pupils suggested by teachers were interviewed. Teachers were asked to suggest the highest ability and poorest ability pupils in the class for interviewing and during the interview they were asked to explain their choice.

The obtained text was analyzed using Critical Discourse analysis (CDA). Compared to other similar perspectives CDA draws a great deal more attention to power relations that can be observed within a discourse. As a method CDA does not involve significant limitations for

its usage. On the contrary – it encourages researchers to adapt the method for their needs and to select instruments that fit best for a specific situation. The main restriction for CDA usage is that the theoretical basis selected should emphasize power relations (Wodak, 2001). With characteristics mentioned in mind it is much more easier to describe CDA not as a method but as a principle or perspective used – it is more an approach that stresses researcher's point of view with regard to social processes (Meyer, 2001): Ruth Wodak points out that it is better to describe CDA as a perspective that can unite several approaches (Wodak, 2001); Teun Adrianus van Dijk defines that CDA is not a specific research direction and that is why it doesn't have one precise theoretical frame (van Dijk, 2001); Norman Fairclough stresses that optimal CDA usage is possible only of differentiation and cross-disciplinarity is encouraged (Fairclough, 1995).

An oversimplified explanation of CDA could be that it is a method that tends to make more visible the links connecting discursive praxis, social praxis, social structures and text. Another explanation could be that CDA explains through power relations the links that affect every social event as well as text usage yet remain unnoticed during everyday text construction and usage. Usually this method is associated with an attempt to observe dominance, discrimination, observable and hidden power and control within language (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). Interpretation that illustrates CDA presupposes that language, dialectically connected to various elements of social reality, is an inseparable part of this reality. It just means that while researching social reality we should draw our attention to language, and language research can be a productive research field (Fairclough, 2003).

CDA explains reality through language analysis. To be more precise I should mention that by using the term "language" I mean language usage – or, if I use more common terminology – text (Fairclough, 1995; 2003; 2006; van Dijk, 1992). Text as a research object can include any praxis of language use – starting from everyday conversations, continuing with books and finishing with focused interviewing. Interpretation of text can be widened to text as cultural artifacts, such as music, a picture on the TV screen, or, as a matter of fact, TV itself. Such differentiation is based on the argument that a text always includes two characteristics: representation and interpretation (Fairclough, 1995).

Both characteristics can create new links and restrictions that emerge from social praxis and factors brought up by a social situation (Fairclough, 2006). Relaying on the mentioned arguments Fairclough defines discourse as language use influenced by social praxis (ibid, 63-64).

CDA will always draw its attention to power relations that can be observed in text (Wodak, 2001; Fariclough, 2006; 1999; van Dijk, 1992; 2000; 2008). We can distinguish between two ways language is linked to power relations: firstly, power relations are located behind and within language and, secondly, power relations emerge from restrictions in language usage – from social praxis that regulates interaction (Wooffitt, 2005). It means that every text is simultaneously connected to power relations, reproduction of power relations and restrictions in situation interpretation. In this way discourses are always connected to ideologies and hegemony of certain groups (van Dijk, 2000; 2008; Fairclough, 1995; 2006).

Michael Foucault, while describing constructing and structuring characteristics of discourse, points out that discourse, as a connection between a wider social formation and observable text usage constructs and positions subjects. It means that discourse constantly shapes and deforms objects that are connected to its usage and by doing so discourse constantly draws borders and power relations. From Foucault's perspective power relations are shaped through defining what is true and by attributing this definition to physical and social reality (Foucault, 1972). Here discourse emerges as a mechanics that allows defining and maintaining a social position by giving opportunity to define themselves and others.

In this paper I am using text analysis to explain how teachers and pupils group pupils. To make my explanation deeper I draw my attention to situations when grouping occurs and to the context of grouping praxis. I use N. Fairclough's three dimensions of discourse analysis as a basis of my analysis. This perspective prescribes that the researcher should start analysis with discursive praxis interpretation, follow up with text description and finish analysis with social praxis interpretation.

Results

In this part I will present results of my research. I have tried to group findings in three sections yet in many cases it isn't possible because of amount of conclusions that are overlapping and can be fitted in every section. That is why I show some of the findings just by selecting where they would fit better in the overall story.

The first section of findings addresses the overall explanation of how grouping can be interpreted and how it fits the official or unofficial praxis of the school. The second section is concerned with arguments used to legitimize grouping or other praxis what doesn't fit official school or state policy. The third section questions characteristics of groups created and shows how arguments are chosen for creating groups.

Grouping praxis

Interpretation of optimal education is shaped by Latvia's education legislation, international regulations and agreements, as well as public opinion. In total these agents produce a non-existent Utopian education vision where every pupil shows or can show high achievements and every teacher is highly involved in the development of every pupil. Here I wouldn't like to expand an interpretation of the accepted education perspective. Yet I want to point out that in a perfect system pupil grouping isn't acceptable and it can't be interpreted as a part of technologized education discourse – discursive form that represents accepted perspective of educational praxis and education characteristics. That is why ideas of grouping are brought in informants' stories and they search for ways to legitimate it.

Such legitimization praxes are interesting from several perspectives. Firstly, they illustrate teacher's interpretation of the characteristics of grouping that make it acceptable and the possible use of identified characteristics in legitimizing a praxis that lies outside technologization. Secondly, it allows observing the kind of knowledge teachers tend to bring into technologized education interpretation.

To begin with I have to point out that while talking about everyday education praxes, both teachers and pupils use several official and unofficial categories to group pupils. Informants show that grouping is

part of everyday education praxis that needs to be supported because, firstly, by doing so the teacher would be able to pursue best pedagogical praxes and an optimal education process, secondly, power relations that are necessary for a successful education process could be reproduced and strengthened through grouping. Yet such praxis shouldn't violate some vague borders that are defined by technologized interpretation.

Grouping seems to be a logical result of distribution of power and the necessity to maintain it yet it acts against meritocratic ideals in education. Knowledge and power in the education system can be linked in several ways. Technologized discourse holds an understanding of authority of the wise/ competent teacher and subordination of pupils willing to learn. Those involved in education interaction expect that the power positions, the meaning of authority and the ways the power is practiced will change depending on the status achieved in the education system. In school one can observe a hierarchy of knowledge which directly influences power distribution and usage – and it is directly connected to the social position that different agents in the class have.

Pupils' development is organized in a gradual manner – every day they learn something new. However achievement control is organized regularly, it is not practiced constantly. Teacher monitors pupils by asking them questions, following-up if they have done their home assignments. He repeatedly interacts with the pupils he is not sure about or whose achievements should be improved. At the basis of interaction described is the assumption that regular control will promote pupils' attainment in the education system: at the end the pupil will realize that conflict relations with the teacher aren't optimal so he will change his unacceptable interaction. Yet pupils, while talking about such processes, comment that it just makes them less positive about the education process as such.

Basic interpretation of grouping in pupil and teacher interviews is connected with pupil's abilities to correspond to some overall expectations about pupil's academic achievements at a given age. It is a perspective of optimal development that is connected to a very wide context both in and out-side school. Optimal development here is viewed as a possibility to receive acceptance for being in power positions. A pupil who is developing according to teacher's evaluation of "the right way" can receive more power in deciding for himself on

optimal schooling, schedule, interaction, etc. – he/she receives the opportunity to avoid being the target of some power practices that the teacher uses in the classroom. Development is similarly described by pupils - however they put more emphasis on physical development by pointing out that age itself can serve as a tool for changes in power relations. It shows that pupils see changes in power structure as inevitable and not necessary connected to invested work, while the teacher can interpret everything through invested work - even biological age.

Within school one can observe a much more differentiated inner age distinction which is created by connection to knowledge, development, biological age and behaviorally manifested age. To be more precise – pupils have to fit expectations in several ways and all expectation perspectives can be used to describe him and make conclusions about his academic abilities. Depending on processes one is talking about both teachers and pupils can select any of these factors to prove a point they are trying to defend. Although there is a certain power attached to every successive stage of age, the pupil can't just use it according his biological age. A more complicated perspective presupposes that age requirements should be fulfilled with regard to all factors. So the teacher and the pupil can subtract somebody's power by pointing out that according to some criteria the person hasn't reached the age of power. For example, during interviews respondents were using such expressions as, "they behave like small kids"; knowledge they don't possess "is taught in the fifth grade"; this they had to know "a year ago", etc.

To conclude I should summarize that grouping is about granting or banning access to power positions. Pupils expect that by growing up they will receive more possibilities to decide for themselves yet teachers using several instruments grant power only to those whom they evaluate as worthy of power. Distribution can be explained through the teacher's expectations which the pupil can match and fail to match in several ways.

Argumentation for grouping

As I mentioned earlier there is overall agreement that education should be represented and perceived as a technologized form. Nevertheless,

rather often something that doesn't fit into technologized form is brought out as part of it. In such cases agents tend to search for ways to support interdiscoursivity. There are several ways in which teachers and pupils tend to link pupil grouping (and other praxes they interpret as unacceptable) with technologized education interpretation.

Pupils usually are well aware of principles used as a basis of grouping. They can identify several pupil groups in the class and explain why the concrete pupils are in the group. However they use knowledge on grouping with a different aim – with grouping they accept some class principles as obvious and legitimate. Such approach allows them avoiding full involvement in education processes. In other words pupils use grouping to legitimate their low involvement in school rituals and other praxes. As a result pupils who are labeled as "*high ability*" are forced to learn while those who are "*poor ability*" can avoid it.

One of the first arguments used to justify grouping is professionalism - informant argumentation suggests that the grouping of pupils serves as a proof of teacher's professionalism. Both teachers and pupils stress that pupils involved in education are different and they represent various needs. Teacher's ability to promote interaction that is based on this differentiation illustrates his professionalism and serves as a basis for pupils' opportunities. This perspective to depict grouping as a natural part of education automatically accepts the line of different arguments as self-evident. The most obvious example of self-evident knowledge is the statement that pupils differ by their abilities, knowledge, interpretation, etc. to such an extent that adaptations in teachers' pedagogy are needed.

This perspective is used commonly, automatically connecting it to other statements describing teacher professionalism which can again be seen as factors describing the way that pupils are grouped. For example, teachers tend to describe how they coordinate pedagogical praxis with other teachers – teachers agree on common interpretation of the pupil and his achievements and agree on what they expect from this pupil. Comments like these are used to illustrate teacher's professionalism and care about the pupil. Pedagogy from this view point is based on needs of every pupil – it is and should be separated from some distant external regulations.

All arguments used are closely connected to an argument that could be called environment. A pupil is part of an environment that helps teachers explaining what this pupil is like – to explain his abilities and achievements. Teachers tend to talk about pupil's parents, family values, place of living and lifestyle, peers, etc. They use pupil's private experience with a certain group as an argument on how such a pupil should be educated or what he can achieve. Even the fact that the teacher doesn't know anything about the pupil can serve as a basis to come to conclusion that the pupil's parents aren't interested in education of their children.

In a similar way teachers tend to use other information accessible – small everyday facts: whether and how the pupil buys lunch in school may be used as an argument to illustrate that the pupil is facing economic problems, the pupil's friends can be used as evidence that illustrates the pupil's interests and leisure time activities. Again – the ability to deduce weighty conclusions from small details is represented as proof of the teacher's professionalism. Commonly such arguments aren't used separately, but as a part of a wider explanation. Another nuance that serves both as a proof and a reference for showing that teacher is not prejudiced is the teachers' ability to distinguish whether the mentioned observation on the pupil is important. In order to demonstrate that they are not prejudiced, teachers tend to explain how they have managed to distinguish exceptions where seemingly obvious hints were wrong.

One more argument used by both teachers and pupils is natural development. This argument presupposes some mental background and natural limits of pupil's abilities. It means that pupil's inability to achieve certain results should be explained through pupil's intellectual limits rather than by teacher's lack of professionalism.

Yet there is one more way to speak about pupil's mental capacities – to explain that some pupils are not meant for this knowledge. Pupils point out that they can't be good in mathematics or physics, because they are "*artists*", they don't have "*mathematical thinking*". In same way teachers tend to label pupils as "*artists*" or "*scientists*" thus explaining why the pupil doesn't show equal results in all subjects.

The forth argument to legitimate pupils grouping is knowledge continuity. Teachers classify pupil's abilities by pointing out that there

has been discontinuity in hierarchical development. Here the informant uses an assumption that knowledge development is a hierarchical process and it isn't possible to obtain knowledge if one hasn't mastered its previous levels. As a result the pupil may be unable to master something because at some previous stage he hasn't been exposed to the right kind of pedagogy. This argument can be used both by teachers and pupils who can explain their present achievements by mentioning something that has happened earlier and can't be changed. The reasons one hasn't learned previous knowledge can differ greatly: it can be that the pupil has missed a great deal of schooling, or he wasn't motivated to learn, or he has been exposed to week pedagogy.

This argument is interesting because of the idea of discontinuity of hierarchical development. This term helps explaining how guilt about unsuccessful learning/ teaching process can be passed to whatever agent in the past. A teacher can point out, that he can't teach the pupil because he has missed certain basic learning in his family or because a previous teacher hasn't done his teaching work well. A pupil can explain that his former teacher wasn't good at teaching or that he himself didn't want to learn.

The last to describe here is the comparative argument. Comparison is based on experience which can serve to compare a pupil, a class, a school to another pupil, class or school. Teachers commonly use comparison to illustrate his former or up-to-date achievements or just to illustrate his knowledge over the field. Again such argument allows legitimating certain achievements.

Most commonly comparison is made within one class between class-mates. A more complicated case is when comparison is created between two or more classes. Teachers can compare to some former classes, to former pupil generations, to pupils' parents (whom they maybe have taught), to other schools in the district or the best schools in the state, etc. By choosing the object to compare with the teacher (and in some cases the pupil too) manages to illustrate every point he is trying to make. Comparison is drawn from the informant's immeasurable context – yet the form of explanation is shaped as the general *truth*.

Grouping and status

The agents involved in the education process can associate any pupil with several interpretations. Connection to a specific label can be interpreted by both - teachers and pupils. Labels can be provoked by separate events, by some explicit characteristic, by ability to integrate into the class group, relatives, etc. Knowledge about a pupil can emerge fast and tends to be persistent - interpretation about the pupil can be practically unchanged yet arguments supporting such interpretation change. Involved agents search and replace arguments to create a more precise and enduring label yet some arguments can be mentioned even if they reflect the situation that occurred several years ago.

During some interviews teachers use the term "*stigma*" underlining that interaction contains prolonged and persistent knowledge that may hold negative attitudes. Usually teachers in interviews doesn't use terms that hold such provocative meaning and prefer much softer pupil interpretation descriptions. Teachers also mention that their knowledge about the taught class may influence interpretation used to interact with pupils.

Other important factor is pupil's self-identification. This definitely is a vast question that is linked to all education praxis. If not provoked pupils rarely tend to give meaningful self-description which would be directly linked to education discourse. By using pronouns and pronominals pupils draw connections with classmates, class and school as an opposition to another school, a parallel class or other classmates. Yet none of such identifications are directly connected to the school (somewhat more often I found a link with education). Although all these categories at the end can be used by somebody to describe the pupil's achievements they don't have any direct connection to influence pupil's achievements.

One explanation that could be used to clarify why pupils practically avoid identification with the school is that for pupils who don't show high achievements the school doesn't offer any significant status. The only status offered to pupils is "*pupil*". As a result most of them don't identify themselves with knowledge they are obtaining or have already obtained. Yet although pupils are not able to identify themselves within the education process they are able to describe affiliation with their

their school and class mates. Even more – pupils can identify the label attached to them and identify the label's influence on his opportunities. For example, a pupil may identify him-self as „slow" and describe that it is the reason he has to learn for longer time than other students.

However, pupils demonstrate a more clear connection to the school and education when they are describing classmates. Pupils often give insight on classmates' relations to the teacher and the school and mention their marks and success in school. Even more – pupils tend to explain classmate achievements both through some personal characteristics and their relations with teachers. I would suggest that pupils notice that success can be explained through teacher's attitude toward the pupil – yet during interviews they reproduce arguments teachers use. Interpretations of pupil achievements are constructed depending on the school context which is both contexts out-side and in-side education system. An additional observation is that when describing classmates' school achievements pupils commonly use more than one criterion. Pupils are simultaneously using several arguments and most are just some conclusions drawn out of one of several contexts out of the education discourse.

A more clear description of pupils is given by teachers. Teachers give comments that there are pupils that are "*mentally challenged*" and that teachers in everyday pedagogy have to deal with that. For teachers' pupils may be "*problematic*", "*hard to teach*", "*spoiled*", "*ailing*", etc. Teachers use a wide range of different and often metaphorical characteristics to describe pupil's inability to fulfill his expectations. Such labels aren't hidden behind the technologized form of education discourse, but legitimized through offered legitimization arguments and then represented as a proof of teachers professionalism: ability to distinct pupil's problems and react based on these conclusions.

Pupils illustrate that there is a connection between teachers' knowledge about the pupil, his individual interpretation about the group he is representing, the pupil's ability to act so that he would be liked by teachers – and the pupil's marks. To be liked by a teacher can be gainful and most pupils not just know that, but can describe strategies employed to become likable.

Quite common is that pupils are described in comparative categories – the description is based on some meaningful oppositions. Knowledge

that underlies such oppositions doesn't differ from school to school. Mainly such distinctions are constructed around pupil categories of who can or has achieved high results and around those who don't or cannot do it.

The group of pupils who don't show high achievements consist of labels such as "*idlers*", "*shortchanged by God*" (Latvian saying), "*slow developing kids*", "*from disadvantageous family*". Here teachers use social, mental and physical arguments at the same time showing that for every pupil there is a line of maximum knowledge that he can achieve and if he knows more it's a proof of the "right" pedagogy.

Some teachers start their description of a class with a relatively mild pupil achievement description – "*lower end*". Such a label could at least theoretically be interpreted just as a description of school's academic achievements. Yet further in his story the teacher would start to use other forms to describe "lower end" pupils – he refers to the group as the "bad ones" ("sliktie"). The second meaning of this Latvian word "*sliktie*" would be "villains". Obviously the last pupil description is much deeper and holds wider interpretation of meanings. One pupil uses the term the "*good list*" which is meant as a group of "*good pupils*". If you're not on this list there is a considerable possibility that you won't have access to the school's resources. In their stories pupils often draw a close link between class achievements and teachers sympathies. This shows that pupils are well aware of the distinction between accepted and un-accepted pupils. In some interviews stories suggest that teachers work with pupils whom they like yet other kids are left on their own. Their contact with the teacher more often is described not through teaching and knowledge but through constant testing, constraints and control.

Although teachers tend to use a technologized interpretation of education, at some point labeling can be used to prove that technologized discourse and accepted knowledge can be far from the context in which *local* school is based. This is just a way how oppositional knowledge finds direct way to school to support struggle for power.

Discussion

I have shown, firstly, pupil-and-teacher interaction in the classroom, secondly, their interpretation of education processes and mutual interaction and, thirdly, pupil grouping mechanisms and their connections to pupil achievements. In order to demonstrate these issues I started with defining the basis of interpreting education processes and education system. With the help of Bourdieu's and Bernstein's theories I was able to illustrate processes that influence pupil opportunities within school. Namely – the school functions based on accepted knowledge that is needed to grant success for one-self. Yet, obviously this explanation isn't adequate, because it doesn't give any real tools that agents could use to influence pupil achievements. This is the reason why two more terms – tracking and labeling - were introduced. Together they show how expectations for certain knowledge and self-representation can affect pupil and teacher mutual relationship and interpretation – two factors that can be used to explain pupil's marks.

In my analysis I showed that mutual interpretation influences pupil's achievements. Yet a lot more interesting conclusion is that pupils are well aware of the scheme I described above. To be more precise they can describe how teacher's interpretation can influence the marks they receive and their everyday relations with the teachers. One of labeling theory arguments is that if a pupil is addressed with the same interpretation persistently, eventually he will respond according to expectations. This argument could be used to explain my observation – pupils tend to accept the teachers' interpretation, because they believe they fit teachers' description.

This line of argumentation however leaves one observation unexplained. Although some pupils are well aware of variations in teachers' communication and they accept that they are not as bright as other students, they still say that if they only wanted to they could change the patterns of interaction. Pupils explain how one can achieve that he is liked by the teacher and can reflect what benefits he would achieve if he could gain teacher's sympathies, yet they choose to remain in the position they are placed in. This could be described as a clash between what pupils actually know and what they do.

One logical explanation that I could offer is that school – the place

where interviews were conducted influences pupils' explanations and interpretations. In school authority relations are deformed and pupils tend to give the "right" response as they would respond to a teacher. Yet the interview situation is new to him so he doesn't know what would be the right answer interviewer expects and he just chooses one he has heard from teachers and reproduces the story of the agent who within the school is an authority. This suggests that pupils reproduced teachers' views. So there isn't any label stickiness – just a willingness to give the answer which wouldn't lead to punishment. It means that there isn't any contradiction – pupils just don't want to be liked by the teacher. In this way they are representing their opposition to the education system.

Yet another explanation would be that pupils are putting blame for their poor results to the system. They acknowledge that they aren't succeeding and that they aren't involved in classroom work in a needed level, to change something. They don't want to be guilty for that. Therefore, accepting a label and showing that the system is corrupted is a way to prove that there are other reasons why they avoid education tasks.

The perspective that has been illuminated by my work is that during education research much more attention should be drawn to education institution context. Most of the questions about education that are there cannot be answered without context references. Although school is a self-contained space with its own power structures and rules it seems that it still is an institution which can function just because of context dependent education interpretation. A school is rooted in local society by strong ties that are unnoticeable if observed from a distance. To explain what actually is happening a considerably more involved research approach is needed.

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Transformación Sociocultural y Desarrollo. Buenas Prácticas o Actuaciones de Éxito

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Sociocultural Transformation & Development. Good Practices or Successful Actions

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Abstract

The most disadvantadged neighborhoods in Europe have received funds from State Administration to eradicate social exclusion and overcome processes of urban ghettoization. These processes are being implemented in several social areas such as housing, employment, and education. Actions, defined as "good practices", are usually valued by the quantity and type and not by the quality and final outcomes they achieve. For example, when they improve the living conditions of the populations in these areas. The INCLUD-ED project shows positive results by replacing these "good practices" by "successful actions". They are grounded on scientific evidence in order to respond to the aims set by the neighbours of these disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Keywords: successful actions, good practices, social inclusion, disadvantaged neighborhoods

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Transformación Sociocultural y Desarrollo. Buenas Prácticas o Actuaciones de Éxito

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Abstract

Los barrios más desfavorecidos de Europa han recibido durante años financiación de las administraciones públicas para erradicar la exclusión y superar los procesos de "guetización" urbana. Estos procesos se han llevado a cabo en diferentes áreas como la vivienda, el empleo o la educación. Estas actuaciones, definidas como "buenas prácticas", suelen ser valoradas por la cantidad y el tipo de las actuaciones, y no por su calidad y resultado final, es decir, que consigan mejorar la situación de los colectivos que viven en estas zonas. El proyecto INCLUD-ED muestra los resultados positivos de sustituir las "buenas prácticas" por "actuaciones de éxito", que se basan en evidencias científicas para responder a los objetivos que se plantean los propios vecinos y vecinas en barrios desfavorecidos y guetizados.

Palabras clave: actuaciones de éxito, buenas prácticas, inclusión social, barrios desfavorecidos

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El Plan Urbanitas contará con apoyo científico para lograr la Integración" (Real, 2009). Esta frase pertenece a una noticia publicada en el diario la Tribuna de Albacete el 12 de Octubre. En ella se informaba de la puesta en marcha de un convenio entre el Centro Especial de Investigación en Teorías y Prácticas Superadoras de Desigualdades de la Universidad de Barcelona, CREA-UB, y el Ayuntamiento de Albacete. Por primera vez en España una institución pública y un centro de investigación en Ciencias Sociales acordaban trabajar conjuntamente para implementar actuaciones para la transformación de la situación de marginalidad de los vecinos y vecinas de dos contextos en riesgo de exclusión social. Se trataba de La Estrella y La Milagrosa, los barrios más desfavorecidos de la ciudad de Albacete. Dicho convenio implica un paso importante en la transformación integral de estos barrios, con el objetivo de conseguir un cambio real en las vidas de su población, quienes se encuentran en una grave situación de exclusión.

La exclusión social y la pobreza son problemas por resolver en Europa, agudizados por la actual crisis económica. La estrategia de la Comisión Europea de cara al 2020 pone de manifiesto la necesidad de fomentar un crecimiento económico basado en la inclusión social. Estos planteamientos están estrechamente ligados a la necesidad y a la urgencia de implementar medidas que reduzcan los niveles actuales de pobreza. En la actualidad, según datos de la Comisión Europea, alrededor de 84 millones de personas en los países de la Unión Europea se encuentran en riesgo de pobreza[1]. En este sentido, la Comisión ha establecido como meta reducir los índices de pobreza en los próximos diez años, de modo que se consiga que 20 millones menos de personas se encuentren o estén en riesgo de padecerla[2]. Las dificultades con las que se encuentra este sector de la población se ven reflejadas en el acceso al empleo y en la imposibilidad de cubrir las necesidades materiales de vida. Ambos son indicadores del riesgo de encontrarse en situación de pobreza. Respecto al indicador de la dificultad de cubrir las necesidades materiales, éste implica la imposibilidad forzada de cubrir tres de los siguientes aspectos: pagar gastos imprevistos, irse de vacaciones una semana, tener gastos, no poder pagar una comida, imposibilidad de calentar la propia casa, posesión de lavadora,

televisión, teléfono o coche.

En los barrios guetizados encontramos los colectivos más vulnerables, con menos recursos, y que tienen un mayor riesgo de exclusión social, como las personas pertenecientes a minorías étnicas y las personas inmigrantes (Wilson y Taub, 2006). En la actualidad, el racismo y la crisis económica están empeorando la situación de estos grupos y están dificultando la salida de esta crisis. En el presente artículo analizaremos en profundidad la situación de estos barrios desfavorecidos e incidiremos en un planteamiento concreto orientado a la superación de la situación de exclusión de su población: aplicar "actuaciones de éxito". Para ello nos centraremos principalmente en el caso de los barrios de La Milagrosa y La Estrella, en la ciudad de Albacete, y en cómo se han puesto en marcha "actuaciones de éxito" a partir de los análisis científicos realizados en el marco del proyecto INCLUD-ED (2006-2011). Contrastaremos este planteamiento con el enfoque inicial de mejora de dichos barrios, forjado en la idea de "buenas prácticas". A partir de este caso, el artículo muestra la manera en que el enfoque de "actuaciones de éxito", fundamentado en las evidencias de la comunidad científica y la participación directa de los colectivos desfavorecidos, está en la base de la mejora de las condiciones de vida de la población de estos barrios-gueto.

Exclusión social y guetización de los barrios desfavorecidos

La literatura científica sobre guetización de los barrios incide en diferentes aspectos. Por un lado existen argumentaciones que dotan de importancia al componente espacial como elemento clave en el proceso de guetización; por otro lado existen los posicionamientos que se decantan más por la situación económica de las personas que habitan en estos enclaves, incluyendo en este análisis las oportunidades laborales. Finalmente cabe señalar las visiones de la sociología urbana reciente que dan explicaciones vinculadas al proceso de globalización y al capitalismo.

La exclusión en determinados enfoques se estudia como un proceso dinámico en el que las personas se ven privadas de aquellos derechos que les garantizan actuar como plenos ciudadanos (Walker, 1997). Desde el punto de vista del componente espacial, algunos barrios

concentran una aglomeración de viviendas degradadas y habitantes con rentas bajas. Estos barrios se encuentran aislados de la vida en la ciudad debido a que el resto de la ciudadanía no quiere ni residir, ni pasar por ellos y este elemento aumenta aún más su situación de marginalidad. Gran parte de la literatura pone el énfasis en que aquello que determina la situación de exclusión de los habitantes de un barrio es el régimen de bienestar en el que éstos se encuentran, es decir, sus posibilidades económicas y poder adquisitivo, la posibilidad de participación social y de integración en el propio barrio (Murie y Musterd, 2004). En esta línea se sitúa Saskia Sassen (2006) quien plantea que en las ciudades coexisten dos clases, uno con poder adquisitivo alto y otra en una situación laboral precaria, que generalmente suele ser población inmigrante que reside en "guetos", en las zonas periféricas. Sassen (2006) plantea que en la ciudad global ambos grupos participan de la economía capitalista y ello agudiza mucho más la desigualdad entre ambos, ya que el colectivo más desfavorecido es el que encuentra más dificultades para seguir adelante. Sus posibilidades laborales son efímeras porque los empleos que desarrollan tienen pocas expectativas, al igual que su nivel de ingresos, que es cada vez más bajo. Estos últimos aspectos son los condicionantes que, según Sassen, llevan a determinados colectivos a desarrollar actitudes de riesgo, las coloquialmente llamadas "pandillas", que presentan actitudes vinculadas a la criminalidad y más próximas por tanto a la exclusión social.

Ante estos análisis sobre los procesos de guetización, existen planteamientos que analizan de forma específica el efecto de las políticas e intervenciones sociales dirigidas a mejorar la situación de marginalidad de la población que vive en este tipo de barrios. Algunos son críticos con determinadas políticas que se están aplicando en estos barrios. Basadas en un enfoque neoliberal, este tipo de políticas tienen como punto de partida un modelo de gobernanza que posee como criterio principal el ejercicio del control exclusivo por parte del Estado, sin que exista una participación de los órganos locales.

Walker (1997) critica la superficialidad de las políticas contra la pobreza propuestas en la década de los noventa (centrándose en el ejemplo británico). El autor plantea que se trata de unas medidas

simples que tratan de resolver un problema complejo, profundo y estructural como es la guetización, sin que exista un compromiso real por parte de las instituciones públicas en pro de un estado de bienestar para todo el mundo. Incluso a menudo también han continuado reproduciendo el racismo y, en consecuencia, el proceso de segregación en las ciudades donde estos grupos se han instalado (Glynn, 2009; Tormo et al., 2003). Por ejemplo, en algunas ciudades donde las políticas locales están creando viviendas para grupos minoritarios, el caso de los hindús en Londres, en barrios con presencia mayoritaria de personas autóctonas, el racismo ha aumentado. La presencia de este colectivo en estos barrios no ha generado una mayor inclusión social y, en ocasiones, se han visto obligados a trasladarse debido a las actitudes de desprecio y xenofobia. Centrando directamente la atención en las políticas sociales, desde la Comisión Europea se han articulado diferentes directrices dirigidas a mejorar la situación de degradación de los barrios guetizados. Como hemos mencionado en la introducción, uno de estas directrices que incide de forma más directa es el Plan URBAN. Este plan implica una inversión importante de los fondos de cohesión europeos para reconstruir barrios de ciudades europeas que se encuentran en una situación desfavorecida. El Plan URBAN empezó en el año 1994, y en el año 2000 se inició el URBAN II[3] que cubrió el periodo de 2000-2006.

Todas las intervenciones presentadas en este apartado tienen un peso muy importante en la mejora de los barrios. De todas formas, el proyecto INCLUD-ED, el primer proyecto integrado de los Programas Marco europeos coordinado por un centro de investigación español en el ámbito de las Ciencias Sociales y Humanas que está identificando "actuaciones de éxito" que promueven la inclusión y la cohesión social en Europa, demuestra que las intervenciones son más efectivas cuando se fundamentan en evidencias científicas y, por tanto, en "actuaciones de éxito". Por ese motivo creemos indispensable diferenciar entre "buenas prácticas" que plantean algunas de las intervenciones que hemos presentado y "actuaciones de éxito", que siguen la filosofía anteriormente descrita de fundamentarse en evidencias científicas, y que el Plan URBAN en los barrios de La Estrella y La Milagrosa de Albacete ya está siguiendo con muy buenos resultados. Más adelante,

profundizaremos en las principales diferencias que ofrecen ambos conceptos.

La situación social y educativa de dos barrios gueto: La Milagrosa y La Estrella (Albacete)

Los barrios de La Milagrosa y La Estrella son los dos más desfavorecidos de la ciudad de Albacete. Se trata de las dos áreas con mayores problemáticas sociales de la ciudad, compuestas por una población mayoritaria de personas gitanas. El barrio de La Milagrosa es conocido en la ciudad y en el resto de España como "Las Seiscientas", que es el número de viviendas que se construyeron a finales de los años 70 e inicios de los 80. El barrio de La Estrella es más pequeño que el de La Milagrosa. Según los últimos datos, basados en la explotación del Padrón Municipal, su población no llega a los 1.000 habitantes, caracterizados por un porcentaje muy elevado de población joven: la media de edad se sitúa en 34 años.

A esta degradación urbanística cabe añadirle también los bajos niveles educativos de sus habitantes. Según datos de la Red Europea de Lucha contra la pobreza y exclusión social de Castilla la Mancha (2008), el 84,3% no supera la educación básica o la primaria. En el ámbito laboral las cifras de desempleo también resultan alarmantes ya que más del 40% de la población residente se encuentra en el paro. Si comparamos estos datos con la media de la ciudad de Albacete constatamos que existe una distancia muy grande, ya que en la ciudad este dato llega exclusivamente al 15%. Tampoco la posesión de un empleo es garantía para las personas residentes ya que según las estadísticas, el salario medio estimado es menor en un 70% del que está registrado para todo el municipio. La realidad social, urbanística y demográfica de La Milagrosa es diferente a la de La Estrella. Su población es mucho mayor llegando en este caso a 2.385 habitantes. La media de edad aún es menor que la de La Estrella, situándose en 26 años. En este caso la población no es exclusivamente gitana, también conviven con ella población paya y extranjera. Respecto a los aspectos urbanísticos cabe señalar que no existen paradas de autobuses que permitan entrar en el área desde otras zonas de la ciudad. Respecto a los niveles educativos, un 7% de la población es analfabeta y un 79% no ha completado la

educación básica o la educación primaria (INCLUD-ED, 2008).

La situación de pobreza, degradación y exclusión en los barrios de La Milagrosa y La Estrella está cambiando de forma gradual gracias a algunas de "actuaciones de éxito" que se han empezado a llevar a cabo recientemente después del convenio entre el ayuntamiento de Albacete y el centro de investigación CREA-UB, como institución coordinadora del proyecto INCLUD-ED. En el siguiente apartado se describirán las diferencias teóricas entre dichas "actuaciones de éxito" y las "buenas prácticas" y se presentarán sus características y efectos en el contexto en ambos barrios.

Buenas prácticas "versus" Actuaciones de éxito

En sus escasos años de historia en La Milagrosa y La Estrella se han implementado actuaciones destinadas a su reconversión social. Este es el caso del primer plan URBAN, que se empezó a desarrollar en diferentes barrios de Albacete en el año 1999. Su fundamento principal era lo que llamamos "buenas prácticas". Estas "buenas prácticas" consistían en acciones que suponían una innovación, ya que de hecho introducían elementos nuevos, diferentes, en el barrio. El planteamiento de las "buenas prácticas" parte de la idea de que con el incremento de los recursos económicos y humanos destinados al barrio se abren más posibilidades para cambiarlo. Dicho concepto se empieza a utilizar en análisis económicos para hacer comparaciones entre empresas e identificar indicadores de eficacia y competitividad que permitan mejorar los procesos de producción (Branan et al., 2006). A posteriori, en los años noventa se adopta dicho enfoque en el diseño y gestión de políticas sociales y educativas (Escudero, 2009). De este modo, diferentes organismos internacionales lo recogen y empiezan a crear "bancos de buenas prácticas". Uno de estos bancos es el que efectúa las Naciones Unidas en el ámbito del desarrollo de las ciudades[4]. De este modo, en la Conferencia de las Naciones Unidas, Habitat II, celebrada en Estambul el año 1996, se hace especial hincapié en tres aspectos: la mejora de las calidad de vida en las ciudades, el urbanismo y el desarrollo sostenible[5].

La influencia de todo este trabajo ha incidido en diferentes países europeos donde se empezaron a implementar planes y políticas de desarrollo y de erradicación de la exclusión social considerando dicho planteamiento. Por ejemplo, en España, el anterior Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales y actual Ministerio de Educación, Política Social y Deporte ha impulsado el V Plan Nacional de Acción para la Inclusión Social presentando las "buenas prácticas" en empleo, políticas para la comunidad gitana y violencia de género como acciones a seguir[6].

En Albacete, el propósito inicial de las "buenas prácticas" que se recogían en el primer plan URBAN era transformar el barrio y mejorar la situación de sus residentes. Más adelante veremos como estas acciones no se basaban en evidencias científicas que avalaran los resultados que podían ofrecer. No existía una base científica contrastada que hubiera demostrado que las mismas actuaciones o similares hubieran conseguido transformaciones sociales con anterioridad en otras ciudades en circunstancias similares. Un segundo error que caracterizaba estas prácticas era que estaban diseñadas e implementadas por personas consideradas expertas, pero ajenas al barrio y que no tuvieron en cuenta las necesidades e intereses reales de los vecinos y vecinas, sus opiniones sobre dónde y cómo era mejor utilizar esos recursos económicos y humanos en el proceso de diseño e implementación. En consecuencia, las "buenas prácticas" a las que nos estamos refiriendo tuvieron una escasa repercusión en la vida de las familias que residían en La Milagrosa y La Estrella. Algunas de esas prácticas estaban relacionadas con la transformación urbanística de ambos barrios, la mejora de la formación para incrementar el nivel educativo de los habitantes y el empoderamiento de los organismos locales para evitar la dependencia de las ayudas de las instituciones gubernamentales. Ninguna de estas medidas recogía las aportaciones que se habían efectuado en la comunidad científica internacional sobre sus áreas de aplicación. Las consecuencias de este hecho fueron, por ejemplo con relación al empleo, que se realizaran cursos de limpieza de un mes con una contratación temporal de tres meses y a posteriori seguir en el paro (Padrós et al., 2011).

Frente a esta situación, en 2009 se tomó la decisión de iniciar una

nueva fase de transformación con un enfoque totalmente diferente, basado en dos criterios considerados cada vez más relevantes en la investigación y en las políticas de mejora de barrios desfavorecidos. El primer criterio es basarse en el conocimiento científico sobre medidas efectivas en la reducción de pobreza y superación de la exclusión social. En este sentido, las investigaciones descriptivas sobre causas, mecanismos de reproducción e incluso medición de la pobreza o la exclusión resultan insuficientes para traducirse en políticas o estrategias que superen dichas situaciones. El segundo criterio es el diálogo con las propias personas a las que irán dirigidas las políticas y/o actuaciones que mejorarán su situación de desigualdad. Tanto las políticas como la investigación asumen cada vez más la necesidad de incluir a los sujetos y colectivos implicados en el proceso, aunque todavía sea más una aspiración y propósito que una realidad (Valls y Padrós, 2011).

La fase de transformación que mencionamos siguió un proceso específico. Primero el ayuntamiento de Albacete firmó un convenio con el centro de investigación CREA-UB para asesorar las actuaciones del nuevo plan URBAN desde la investigación científica. De esta forma se pone en marcha este plan siguiendo un proceso totalmente diferente al proceso del anterior URBAN. A posteriori desde CREA-UB se explicó a los profesionales que trabajaban en ambos barrios y que habían estado implicados en el anterior plan las actuaciones que habían tenido éxito en otras zonas del mundo en circunstancias similares, aportando evidencias de esos resultados exitosos. Finalmente se estableció un diálogo entre investigadores y todo el vecindario a través del cual se presentaron dichas actuaciones con el objetivo de gestionar su aplicación e implementación teniendo en cuenta la voz y la experiencia (Aubert y Lalor, 2011). El dinero que se destina desde el plan URBAN pretende ser una herramienta con la que las administraciones locales y regionales consigan una rehabilitación integral de ambos barrios, concentrando actuaciones desde el punto de vista de las viviendas, planes urbanísticos, bienestar social, formación y empleo, revitalización económica, movilidad, accesibilidad, equipamiento e infraestructura. De hecho, el proyecto de transformación se organiza a partir de un enfoque de "actuaciones de éxito" y un proceso de contraste y contextualización basado en la metodología comunicativa crítica.

Estas "actuaciones de éxito" van acompañadas de indicadores que muestran avances significativos en la mejora social de los barrios. En el caso que estamos analizando dichos indicadores muestran con notoriedad cómo las actuaciones están ayudando a superar las barreras que dificultan la inclusión social de los habitantes de La Milagrosa y La Estrella. Por ejemplo, en el ámbito educativo se han cuantificado dichas mejoras a partir de diferentes aspectos como: la disminución del nivel de absentismo respecto a cursos anteriores, la mejora de resultados en la prueba objetiva de competencias de educación primaria que se realiza en la comunidad autónoma y el aumento de la matrícula. Respecto a otros ámbitos, como el laboral, también se han articulado una serie de indicadores de éxito vinculados en este caso a la inserción laboral con contratos a largo de plazo de algunas personas que se encontraban en el paro.

En los siguientes apartados expondremos con más detalle el proceso de aplicación de las "actuaciones de éxito" y sus resultados. En primer lugar, introducimos la metodología que forja la investigación en "actuaciones de éxito": la metodología comunicativa crítica (Gómez et al., 2006; Oliver et al., 2011). Posteriormente, presentamos las transformaciones que se están consiguiendo en los barrios de La Milagrosa y La Estrella a través de la implementación de las "actuaciones de éxito". Finalmente, describiremos el impacto que estas "actuaciones de éxito" están teniendo en el ámbito político, habiéndose convertido ya en directrices políticas implementadas por el Ayuntamiento de Albacete.

Metodología comunicativa crítica

La metodología comunicativa crítica (MCC) ha sido reconocida por la Dirección General de Investigación de la Unión Europea como la perspectiva metodológica más adecuada para trabajar con colectivos vulnerables, porque está orientada no sólo al análisis de estos grupos sino también a la transformación de su situación de exclusión (Padrós et al., 2011).

Investigaciones previas realizadas en base a esta metodología ofrecen numerosas evidencias del carácter transformador que posee (CREA-UB,

2001-2004). Por lo general, cuando se trabaja con colectivos vulnerables, los estudios suelen realizar descripciones más o menos detalladas de la situación, buscando conexiones significativas entre conjuntos de variables. La MCC rompe con este punto de vista e incluye las voces de las propias personas de los colectivos vulnerables con los que se trabaja desde el diseño de la investigación hasta la interpretación de los resultados y atendiendo siempre a criterios de transformación de las situaciones de exclusión.

El aspecto más sobresaliente de la MCC es que pone en diálogo las personas que viven las situaciones investigadas, en el caso que aquí explicamos, en los barrios de La Milagrosa y La Estrella, con las personas investigadoras, profesionales y responsables políticos. La MCC parte de que todas las personas tenemos capacidad de lenguaje y acción (Habermas, 1987; Vygotsky, 1996), de la necesidad de usar el lenguaje para llegar a comprender los elementos que explican una situación de exclusión (Searle y Soler, 2004), y sobre todo, para identificar qué es lo que contribuye a salir de ella. En INCLUD-ED se han identificado "actuaciones de éxito" en escuelas y barrios que sufrían situaciones de exclusión parecidas a La Milagrosa y La Estrella de Albacete. La MCC, a través del diálogo igualitario con las propias personas de los dos barrios, detecta cuáles son las claves del cambio y cómo aplicarlos en ese determinado contexto. Ese diálogo permanente que se lleva a cabo con las propias personas es lo que garantiza la recreación de las actuaciones con éxito.

Esta labor es posible gracias a que se asume que las ciencias sociales tienen un profundo carácter transformador (Wright, 2010). Establecer el diálogo igualitario, basado en un proceso de argumentación orientado por criterios de veracidad y certidumbre, de ética y moralidad, marca de manera ineludible el carácter propio de la investigación.

En el caso de La Milagrosa y La Estrella este proceso de diálogo y contraste se ha concretado a partir de reuniones periódicas con personas vinculadas a la vida cotidiana de ambos barrios: familias, profesionales de los servicios sociales, profesorado de los centros educativos y personas investigadoras del centro de investigación CREA-UB. En estas reuniones el equipo investigador compartió la información identificada en el proyecto INCLUD-ED sobre aquellas "actuaciones de éxito" que

en diferentes áreas sociales (participación social, vivienda, salud, educación y empleo) habían tenido éxito en otros contextos. Dicha información se contrastó con la propia experiencia de las personas que residen en el barrio y que lo conocen mejor. De esta forma se recrearon las "actuaciones de éxito" y se fue definiendo su aplicación en los dos barrios, considerando sus características propias.

Transformaciones en los barrios de la Milagrosa y la Estrella

A continuación se van a presentar algunas de las transformaciones conseguidas en los barrios de La Milagrosa y La Estrella a través de la aplicación de "actuaciones de éxito" siguiendo un enfoque de trabajo basado en la metodología comunicativa crítica. Se aportan datos cuantitativos y cualitativos recogidos para la investigación INCLUD-ED. En el marco de este proyecto se han efectuado cinco estudios de caso longitudinales de cuatro años de duración que han permitido obtener los datos que aquí se plasman. Estos estudios de caso se han llevado a cabo en centros escolares de diferentes países de Europa: Finlandia, España, Malta, Lituania e Inglaterra. Dichos centros fueron seleccionados por el equipo investigador porque respondían a una serie de condiciones: a) están contribuyendo al éxito educativo del alumnado considerando las características sociales de su entorno; b) poseen un nivel socio-económico bajo y alumnado de minorías étnicas y c) se caracterizan por una importante participación de la comunidad que está contribuyendo a la superación de desigualdades. Como el colegio la Paz respondía a todas estas condiciones fue finalmente seleccionado. En él se incluían las siguientes técnicas de recogida de datos: un cuestionario a alumnado y familias, un grupo de discusión con profesionales implicados en el centro, tres observaciones comunicativas, trece entrevistas en profundidad (cuatro a representantes de la administración pública, cinco a representantes de la comunidad y cuatro a profesionales que trabajan en el centro), dieciséis relatos comunicativos de vida cotidiana (nueve a familiares y siete a estudiantes).

Principalmente se van a describir transformaciones en cinco ámbitos sociales distintos: educación, prevención de la delincuencia, empleo, urbanismo y salud. Nos detenemos primero en su proceso de

implementación y a continuación en los cambios conseguidos. De modo que en una reunión celebrada el 27 de noviembre de 2009, miembros del Ayuntamiento de Albacete (del área de Acción Social), del Observatorio de la Igualdad, la inspección de la zona (Consejería de Educación, de la Junta de Castilla-la-Mancha), la Gerencia Municipal de urbanismo, el director del proyecto INCLUD-ED, miembros de CREA-UB y técnicos tanto de programas europeos, como del proyecto URBAN, llegaron al acuerdo de aplicar el enfoque de las "actuaciones de éxito" en los ámbitos mencionados. Se organizaron un número específico de sesiones, en diferentes espacios del barrio: la escuela o el centro sociocultural, en la que el equipo investigador del CREA-UB compartieron con la comunidad las "actuaciones de éxito" que estaban generando mejoras en diferentes partes del mundo y las contrastaron con el conocimiento basado en la experiencia de las personas de los barrios.

Con relación al ámbito de la educación, los datos recogidos para el proyecto INCLUD-ED muestra evidencias claras de mejora escolar en el colegio La Paz como producto de la aplicación de "actuaciones educativas de éxito[7] que se empezaron a aplicar en el curso 2006-2007. Una de las primeras evidencias fue el descenso del absentismo, que se ha reducido en más de un 40% en tres cursos escolares transcurridos (CREA-UB, 2008). Otra de las evidencias más claras de este cambio lo podemos observar en los datos de matriculación. En cinco cursos escolares se ha duplicado la matriculación de alumnado, pasando de 100 alumnos el curso 2005-2006 a 200 el curso 2010 – 2011 (CREA-UB, 2010). Por último, señalar que la influencia de las "actuaciones de éxito" se ha hecho notar también en los resultados en adquisición de competencias instrumentales en los dos últimos cursos (2008-2009 y 2009-2010). Así, la mejora considerable en matemáticas y lengua hace que el alumnado del centro, caracterizado por su fracaso escolar, se esté hoy acercando a la media de la Comunidad Autónoma. De modo que por ejemplo en la competencia matemática se ha pasado de uno a tres puntos de promedio y en lengua de dos a tres puntos (Íbidem, 2010).

En el ámbito de la prevención de la delincuencia los vecinos y profesionales vinculados a los barrios nos detallan los pasos conseguidos. Por ejemplo, el mediador intercultural gitano, figura importante en este proceso de extensión de las "actuaciones de éxito" al

vecindario, nos explica algunas de los logros. Él es fundador de la Asociación Socioeducativa e Intercultural (ASIEM) ubicada en la ciudad de Albacete (De Botton & Muñoz, en prensa).

Una de las intervenciones que está articulando, bajo la coordinación del mediador, es la gestión de los servicios a la comunidad desarrollados por personas del barrio con medidas judiciales. A través de una Comisión de convivencia mixta, formada por entidades, servicios sociales, familiares y maestros deciden qué tipo de actividades se pueden llevar a cabo en el colegio la Paz para cumplir con las medidas judiciales que han recibido. De esta forma se consigue evitar daños colaterales como la imposibilidad de pagar las multas por las infracciones cometidas o realizar servicios a la comunidad en contextos donde las personas del barrio serían estigmatizadas.

Otra actuación de éxito en el ámbito socio-educativo que nace del diálogo con la comunidad es el proyecto Centro Fin de Semana, más conocido como Centro Finde. En este sentido se constató la necesidad de disfrutar de proyectos educativos, siguiendo algunas experiencias de éxito internacionales que funcionan todos los días de la semana de 8h a 20h. Por eso la comunidad se quejó de que hubiera servicios que únicamente funcionaran de lunes a viernes hasta las 17h, quedando los jóvenes sin nada que hacer después de que los trabajadores sociales acabaran en el barrio su jornada laboral. El Centro Finde partía de una necesidad del barrio, la de ofrecer actividades vinculadas al ocio, al tiempo libre y a la educación para los y las jóvenes fuera del horario escolar. Su existencia ya está permitiendo a niñas y niños y jóvenes de La Estrella y La Milagrosa no reproducir conductas de riesgo que les llevan al consumo y al tráfico de drogas. En los acuerdos firmados entre Ayuntamiento y otras entidades y administraciones involucradas a nivel político y social en el proceso de transformación, se especifica que este centro alberga distintas oficinas para servicios que estén abiertos a la comunidad. El centro empezó su andadura recientemente, en Noviembre del 2010, en un espacio físico aún provisional. En su corta trayectoria, el Finde ya ha conseguido que unos 140 niños/as, adolescentes y jóvenes participen diariamente de las actividades que en él se concretan (De Botton y Muñoz, en prensa).

Respecto al ámbito de la salud, el mediador de la zona también

subraya el papel central que está teniendo el colegio la Paz en el desarrollo de actuaciones preventivas al consumo de drogas. Tanto La Milagrosa como La Estrella son barrios azotados por la drogadicción y la escuela se está convirtiendo en un revulsivo para erradicar este tipo de problemáticas, tal y como señala el mediador:

> Incluso te puedo decir alguno que tenía problemas con sustancias, pues desde la escuela se trata de darle lugar, que se vea que ella puede hacerlo, de que vale. Pues luego nos ha pedido ayuda para salir de este tema. Y creo que es un ejemplo bastante positivo (Mediador intercultural gitano).

En la misma línea una vecina señala cómo su implicación activa en los procesos de toma de decisiones en la escuela, que es otra actuación de éxito, ha conseguido modificar su autoimagen y ayudarla a dejar las drogas. De repente, se ha visto a sí misma como una persona valorada, que podía participar y hacer aportaciones importantes para la comunidad, por ejemplo y lo estaba haciendo en el terreno de la educación, contribuyendo a mejorar el futuro de sus hijos y de todos los chicos y chicas de los dos barrios. Eso provocó un proceso personal de revalorización en esta mujer que le hizo ver y entender la droga de una forma muy diferente:

> Yo a aparte tuve una época que estuve muy mal, estuve enganchada a las drogas. Estuve en un centro casi 7 meses. Y entonces la temporada esa pues yo de mis hijos no me preocupaba. Al revés, incluso que ellos se levantaban, se vestían, se venían. Luego ya salí del centro, y salí bien, estábamos mi marido y yo. ¡Y yo no he vuelto a caer gracias al colegio, empezar a venir al colegio, implicarme… para mí es muy importante, muy importante! Me ha cambiado la vida, completamente, en todos los aspectos. Ahora estoy por mis hijos, estoy más por ellos. Para mí ha sido mi salvación, para decirlo aquí. Yo creo que si no hubiera venido aquí, hubiera caído otra vez, y cuando sales del centro es muy duro (Madre gitana).

En el ámbito del empleo, el diálogo entre el equipo investigador y el vecindario sobre las necesidades laborales del barrio constató, por una

parte, la importancia de conseguir credenciales educativas para poder acceder con mayores garantías al mercado de trabajo y, por otra parte, la necesidad real de personal de apoyo en horario no escolar en diferentes centros escolares de los barrios de La Milagrosa y La Estrella. Fruto del contraste entre esta realidad del barrio y las "actuaciones de éxito" del proyecto INCLUD-ED, se emplazó la secundaria en el barrio (1º y 2º de la ESO) y se llevó a cabo el curso de monitoras de tiempo libre, entre otras muchas acciones. Este último congregó a muchas mujeres gitanas. Las entidades sociales del barrio vieron muy conveniente aprovechar la experiencia que las mujeres gitanas estaban adquiriendo con su participación en calidad de voluntarias en el colegio La Paz e iniciar un curso formativo gratuito de este tipo. Posteriormente, la creación de una comisión mixta en la que intervinieron servicios sociales, entidades y centros escolares permitió que se iniciaran estos cursos. En dicha comisión se consensuó que el objetivo del curso era la inserción laboral de las mujeres del barrio. Todas las partes ganaron con esta actuación de éxito. Las madres gitanas encontraron empleo en el barrio, experimentaron procesos de transformación personal muy importantes y las escuelas cubrieron sus necesidades con personas que ya conocían la escuela y de la misma cultura que los niños a atender, ambas características aumentaron la calidad del servicio en ambos centros.

En la siguiente cita un maestro del colegio la Paz nos detalla las mejoras a nivel emocional, económico y familiar que ha observado en las mujeres que iniciaron este curso:

> Se sentirán más seguras y cuando uno tiene seguridad, si estas chicas encuentran la seguridad de un trabajo pues van a levantar cabeza, realmente crecer como personas, como madres en la educación de sus hijos porque son ellas, los miembros de la comunidad qué es de este barrio que es un entorno difícil, pero oye mira, si tienes integración laboral, y ésas familias se integran más en la comunidad nuestra, en la comunidad de aprendizaje, se sienten bien en el barrio porque ahora tienen una fuente de ingresos y mejora todo, mejoran los niños, mejora el cole, mejora nuestro trabajo, mejora el trabajo de los que vienen fuera, mejoran las familias, nuestra relación con las familias. Yo estoy convencido de ello, ahora hay que darles la oportunidad de que no solo sea un curso. (Maestro del Colegio La Paz)

Participaron 14 mujeres y 12 de ellas, es decir más un 85%, consiguieron encontrar empleo en comedores escolares de los barrios. Las propias mujeres relatan en qué medida todas ellas han ido encontrando empleos gracias a la realización de este curso:

> Del curso que hicimos nosotras, hay dos trabajando en extraescolares. Una aquí trabajando en el comedor del colegio y otra en el [Colegio] Ave María, y eso también ha ayudado el colegio a estar trabajando. (Chica joven gitana)

En el ámbito laboral, existen otros indicadores de éxito que demuestran la línea de mejora del barrio en este campo. En este caso, cabe apuntar la importancia laboral de la entidad Miguel Fenollera, que en el año 2011 crea una cooperativa de trabajo. Ésta era una de las "actuaciones de éxito" que en el proceso de debate entre el equipo investigador y la comunidad se decidió poner en marcha en este ámbito. En el primer mes de funcionamiento, la cooperativa ha conseguido empleo para 11 personas que se encontraban en paro. Muchos de esos trabajos están vinculados al ámbito del ocio y el tiempo libre. Según datos de la alcaldía en este corto periodo de la implementación del Plan URBAN se han creado alrededor de 106 nuevos puestos de trabajo (La Cerca, 2010)[8].

Con relación al ámbito del urbanismo, el mediador intercultural gitano argumenta que se han manifestado ciertos cambios también en esta área. Las "actuaciones de éxito" que se han ido definiendo en el centro escolar La Paz y en los ámbitos anteriormente mencionados han tenido una repercusión positiva en la imagen urbana del barrio de la Milagrosa. Se han creado nuevos equipamientos y la imagen exterior que hay del barrio se está viendo transformada.

> Antes salías de las Seiscientas si querías participar en algo. Antes el discurso era: no pero saquémosles de las Seiscientas para que tengan contacto con otra realidad. Y ahora decimos: Vamos a ver es necesario que ustedes vengan a las Seiscientas. Que si quieren aprender de convivencia, de grupos interactivos, de intervención dialógica, si quieren saber cómo funciona una AFA, las acciones en voluntariado que funcionan tendrán que venir ustedes a las Seiscientas. Y vienen. Se nos ha abierto una farmacia nueva, locales

> nuevos… la gente ya viene a las Seiscientas (Mediador intercultural gitano).

Respecto al estado de las viviendas, como hemos visto en apartados previos, la situación es muy precaria. Con el inicio de las actuaciones educativas de éxito en el colegio La Paz y otras actuaciones desarrolladas por la asociación Miguel Fenollera[9] se están dando pasos que ya han demostrado la mejora de esta situación. Una evidencia de ello es el cambio de hábitos ya consolidados en los hogares y en las zonas compartidas del vecindario y las mejoras en las infraestructuras y edificios. En este caso un niño explica, por un lado, cómo las prácticas vinculadas a la limpieza han cambiado en el territorio gracias a la responsabilidad adquirida por todos y todas. Se ha pasado a "tener cuidado y dar atenciones" a las instalaciones y espacios públicos presentes en el barrio. Y por el otro, como se han articulado medidas que han transformado el entorno físico de sus viviendas

> Que sean más limpios, que no tiren la basura por la ventana. Yo he visto que eso está cambiando. En mi portal han puesto vallas, cristales, la han pintado, han cambiado las puertas para todos los vecinos. Para que limpien el portal cuando está sucio, limpien la terraza, limpien todo… (Niño gitano. 12 años)

Por otro lado, la asociación Miguel Fenollera ha desarrollado intervenciones cuyos frutos se están empezando a visibilizar. Por ejemplo, se han evitado dos desahucios de dos mujeres separadas que tenían los hijos a su cargo. También se ha articulado un programa de apoyo a familias con dificultades con el objetivo de cambiarles de vivienda debido a un problema de tráfico de drogas que se vivía en frente del edificio donde habitaban.

Por último, como hemos podido comprobar a lo largo de este apartado, el impacto de todo este proceso de aplicación de las "actuaciones de éxito" se está evidenciando en múltiples ámbitos sociales de los barrios de La Estrella y La Milagrosa. En este sentido cabe señalar que la escuela la Paz, eje neurálgico, está teniendo un papel principal en la consolidación de dichas actuaciones como primer lugar de implementación y éxito de las actuaciones educativas de éxito:

> No solo somos una comunidad dentro de la educación reglada, fuera también. Hemos instaurado modelo dialógico en el barrio. Antes se arreglaba todo a través del insulto, de la ley del más fuerte. Hemos tenido algún problema, alguno bastante grave y se nos ha solicitado a los mediadores que si podíamos mediar dentro del conflicto, que no teníamos que ver nada porque a veces eran temas familiares. Pero como el modelo ha calado tanto, hemos mediado con servicios sociales… hemos llegado a un punto que si alguna persona ha de hablar con su trabajadora social se pasa antes por el cole porque se siente más seguro. (Mediador intercultural gitano)

Conclusiones

Los enfoques que analizan la problemática de la exclusión y la marginalidad de los grupos vulnerables se centran sobre todo en tres aspectos: el contexto, el económico y el vinculado a la aplicación de políticas públicas. Como hemos visto a lo largo del artículo a estos análisis cabe añadirles la articulación de diferentes medidas e intervenciones para transformar la situación de dichos colectivos. Estas medidas se han aplicado muy a menudo a través de "buenas prácticas" y no en base a "actuaciones de éxito" que estuvieran fundamentadas en evidencias científicas de éxito. Por eso, en la mayoría de ocasiones, como hemos podido comprobar en el artículo, las "buenas prácticas" no han tenido una repercusión directa en la mejora de la vida de la comunidad.

Durante años, las administraciones también han invertido muchos recursos económicos para tratar de atajar las situaciones de exclusión de los vecinos y vecinas de La Milagrosa y La Estrella en Albacete. De hecho en el año 1999 la Comisión Europea ya destinó fondos europeos, para mejorar la ciudad de Albacete, incluyendo al contexto de La Milagrosa y La Estrella[10]. Estos fondos, parte del programa URBAN, se destinaron a "buenas prácticas", que se concretaron en proyectos de innovación mantenidos gracias a la suma de dinero que la Comisión Europea ofreció. Una vez finalizada la subvención, estos proyectos no tuvieron el impacto que se esperaba en la vida de las personas

manteniendo la misma situación de marginalidad e incrementando la desilusión de las vecinas y vecinos. Esas "buenas prácticas" eran insostenibles por dos razones: por la cantidad de recursos que implicaban y porque no partían de evidencias científicas que mostrasen su éxito en otros contextos donde se habían aplicado.

En contraste a las "buenas prácticas" encontramos las "actuaciones de éxito", que sí se fundamentan en la investigación científica acumulada sobre el problema que se quiere solucionar. Además, el desarrollo e implementación de las "actuaciones de éxito" implica que las personas afectadas participen de forma directa en la toma de decisiones. Esto está en la línea de los principios de actuación de la MCC, que son el eje central de la articulación de dichas "actuaciones de éxito" y dan una orientación profundamente diferente a lo que es trabajar con la comunidad desde las Ciencias Sociales. Desde la perspectiva comunicativa crítica, no se trata de aplicar "buenas prácticas" para las y los habitantes de los barrios excluidos sino aplicar "actuaciones de éxito" con ellos y ellas posteriormente al contraste entre el conocimiento científico sobre cómo se supera la marginalidad y el conocimiento contextual y cultural de los habitantes.

Como se ha presentado en este artículo el planteamiento de las "actuaciones de éxito" del proyecto INCLUD-ED ya está ofreciendo un camino riguroso con el cual los colectivos desfavorecidos de La Estrella y La Milagrosa, están dando pasos hacia la salida de la exclusión en diferentes áreas. Dado el carácter universal y transferible de las "actuaciones de éxito", el caso de La Estrella y La Milagrosa no es exclusivo, sino que su éxito es posible en otros contextos a través de la aplicación de esas "actuaciones de éxito". Con ellas, se hace posible un uso efectivo de los recursos económicos destinados a la superación de la desigualdad.

Notes

[1] http://www.2010againstpoverty.eu/news/news/news8.html?langid=es [4 de Diciembre de 2010]
[2] http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm [4 de Diciembre de 2010]
2010]
[3] http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/urban2/towns_prog_en.htm [1 de Diciembre de 2010]
[4] Se puede acceder a este banco a través del siguiente link:
http://www.bestpractices.org/background.htm [19 de Julio de 2011]
[5] http://www.un.org/spanish/conferences/habitat.htm [20 de Julio de 2011]
[6]http://www.msps.es/politicaSocial/inclusionSocial/docs/2009_0_plan_nac_accion_inclusion_social_2008_2010.pdf [19 de Julio de 2011]
[7] Las actuaciones a que nos referimos son: grupos interactivos, biblioteca tutorizada, tertulias literarias dialógicas, extensión del tiempo de aprendizaje y formación de familiares.
[8] http://www.lacerca.com/noticias/albacete/carmen_plan_urbanitas_barrios-69990-1.html [21 de Julio de 2011]
[9]https://docs.google.com/fileview?id=0B7hbonPFHlY5NmZjYTRjNTAtYjFiMS00ZDgyLWJlOWItNzUwZmM0OWMyNDgw&hl=es [19 de Julio de 2011]
[10] http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/urban2/urban/initiative/programmes/albacete.html [22 de Julio de 2011]

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Innnovar en la Universidad: Prácticas, Políticas y Retóricas

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Reviews (I)

Martínez, J. B. (2012). *Innovar en la Universidad: Prácticas, Políticas y Retóricas.* Barcelona: Graó. ISBN: 978-84-9980-383-8

Lo acaecido a raíz del proceso de Bolonia y culminado con la implantación del Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior ha transformado formalmente la universidad. Si bien estos cambios no se han dado en todos los agentes implicados, ni en todos los factores que entran en juego. Desde el libro Innovación en la universidad: prácticas, políticas y retóricas Nicolás López, José Gimeno Sacristán, José Manuel Escudero, Francesc Imbernón, Ramón Flecha y Sandra Racionero, Juan Bautista Martínez, y Daniel Peña reflexionan sobre el presente y futuro próximo de la universidad española.

Uno de los temas centrales es el docente en la universidad, entendido como docente-investigador. En la actualidad la falta de formación docente del profesorado universitario, que a diferencia del de niveles educativos inferiores no tiene una formación inicial en competencias docentes, es un hecho. La necesidad de un conocimiento científico no está acompañada de la necesidad de un conocimiento pedagógico. Pero, ¿el profesor universitario es docente o investigador? En el libro se presentan diferentes perspectivas, para Ramón Flecha y Sandra Racionero, para enseñar con calidad es necesario estar a la última en investigación para poder enseñar los mejores saberes (p. 124). Por contra, Francesc Imbernon plantea que el docente ha de dejar de ser un científico que investiga, para pasar a ser una profesión con carácter propio (p. 92), ya que la docencia universitaria debería cubrir aspectos emocionales, sociales y didácticos. En esta línea José Gimeno considera

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que el docente tiene que tener al menos tres capacidades docentes: que el contenido sea relevante, que sea significativo y que el aprendizaje sea motivador (pp. 49-50). Entonces…¿Qué transformó Bolonia en el profesorado universitario, José Manuel Escudero considera que la reforma del Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior apenas ha transformado la realidad al no participar los implicados. En este sentido podríamos recordar el lema de Roland Havelock y Allan Huberman (1977) de "la innovación sin cambio". Al final la reforma queda en el aprendizaje de trucos para satisfacer los indicadores de calidad (p. 71), pero que no han transformado la universidad. Si bien, parece haber un consenso en los que Andy Hargreaves (1996) denominó intensificación, un aumento desmedido de las tareas burocráticas que limitan la dedicación a la docencia.

El otro aspecto destacado del libro es el futuro de la universidad. Daniel Peña plantea una serie de transformaciones de la universidad para el futuro, estando dedicadas a competir entre ellas, a ligar la financiación a resultados, y a plantear la gobernanza (pp. 174-178). Si bien este cambio se presenta bajo una doble perspectiva de la rendición de cuentas a la sociedad y la eficacia en el gobierno universitario, puede considerarse que es el paso para que la universidad se guíe bajo una lógica empresarial. Es lo que Juan Bautista Martínez define como un cambio de la universidad tradicional a la tradición empresarial (p.140-141), en la que profesorado y estudiantado se convierten en clientes (p.154). En el fondo está presente qué es la universidad, que ya lo presenta en la introducción Nicolás López, mostrando que a lo largo de la historia se ha considerado su función desde preparar trabajadores, hasta tener un carácter humanista, pasando por preservar el saber (p. 12)

Para concluir, Innovación en la universidad: prácticas, políticas y retoricas es un texto que no ofrece soluciones, pero que presenta una gran variedad de perspectivas que permiten al lector informarse de diferentes formas de entender la actualidad universitaria. La principal aportación es que la lectura del libro completo no deja indiferente, obliga al debate y a tomar postura por la universidad del siglo XXI. Porque como afirman Morten Levine y Davvyd Greenwood (2011) la actual crisis de la universidad es una posibilidad para realizar cambios desde dentro por una mejor universidad y una sociedad más democrática. Nos vemos en un futuro apasionante.

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Una Europa Alemana

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Reviews (II)

Beck, U. (2012). *Una Europa Alemana.* Barcelona: Paidós. ISBN: 978-84-493-2803-9

En este pequeño ensayo el sociólogo alemán presenta una atrevida reflexión sobre los horizontes posibles hacia los que podemos encaminar nuestros pasos en Europa. Beck utiliza su enfoque de la sociedad del riesgo como sociedad del "podría." Europa ha sido asolada por los vientos huracanados de los abusos cometidos en las finanzas internacionales. Este ha sido el detonante de muchas situaciones de privación y exclusión social a lo largo de los países que integran la Unión, especialmente de los situados en la denominada "Europa del Sur." Las restricciones del gasto público y la clara tendencia al control del déficit público se traduce muchas veces en cargar con los efectos negativos de la crisis a las personas más vulnerables que viven en los estados de la Unión. Este hecho ha conducido a miles de personas tanto en capitales principales, como en municipios diminutos, a ocupar las calles reivindicando un golpe de timón en las políticas económicas y sociales en Europa. Beck repasa a lo largo de estas páginas debates como "la salida del euro", o la "salida de la Unión", que se han producido en diversos territorios de estados miembros.

Sin embargo, aunque pudiera parecer que la situación es desesperada, también se trata de un momento de posibilidad... posibilidad de cambio. Las instituciones propias del estado-nacional se han vuelto anacrónicas e incapaces para dirimir los nuevos flujos globales. Una decisión en Alemania afecta la vida de miles y miles de personas en Grecia. Por tanto, las reglas y las instituciones que hasta ahora nos habían funcionado para vivir conjuntamente tienen que dejar paso a otras reglas

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que sirvan para gestionar los problemas sociales actuales. Eso, sin embargo, exige un debate profundo que tiene sus riesgos: afrontar de manera solidaria las situaciones de exclusión social implica también un organismo supra-estatal que tenga las competencias y la capacidad necesaria para decidir cómo distribuir el gasto público tanto en Berlín como en Nicosia. Pero eso significa una pérdida de soberanía de los estados sobre sus propias cuentas. Significa que mis impuestos a lo mejor no me vuelven en forma de servicios públicos, sino que se van para otros países donde son más necesarias ese tipo de inversiones. Construir una Europa económica y financiera, con un Banco Central Europeo que realmente tenga capacidad operativa para regular las macroeconomías y controlar la actividad de los bancos en los diferentes países, implica también que los bancos centrales de cada uno de los estados miembros quedan supeditados a esta entidad.

Por otro lado, la política de establecer Fondos Permanentes de Rescate Europeos diseñados para acudir al auxilio de los estados que entran en la bancarrota, a cambio de esfuerzos titánicos trasladados a la ciudadanía para devolver un dinero que los países ricos de la Unión se niegan a prestar sin que los países deudores se comprometan a cumplir con unas condiciones estrictas, está generando la aparición de "dos" Europas, la "Europa de los países acreedores" y la "Europa de los países deudores." Como resultado las desigualdades sociales y económicas se están extremando. La clase media europea, acomodada después de décadas de "holgura", asiste a un desmantelamiento de derechos sociales, entre otros motivos, porque ya no es posible continuar manteniendo un ritmo de vida a costa de miles de personas que en su día trabajaron para acumular un capital que se ha estado dilapidando sin perdón. Los costes se están reajustando a nivel internacional, y la riqueza también se desplaza hacia otras regiones, mayoritariamente situadas en el "lejano Oriente." Los tigres asiáticos de los noventa son ahora los banqueros del mundo. La hipoteca que se contrata en un banco catalán, la tiene ahora otro banco en China, que no está dispuesto a perder el dinero que prestó. En Europa, Alemania es quien ha sabido gestionar de manera más responsable el gasto, y es quien tiene el dinero para cubrir los excesos de otros. Pero eso crea un sentimiento de recelo que tiene el peligro potencial de fracturar la cohesión social en Europa. Beck advierte de la necesidad de ponerse en la piel del otro, como

condición necesaria para el surgimiento de una Europa más democrática. Frente a discursos basados en el odio, en echar las culpas de nuestra situación a las personas (naciones) que entendemos que viven "mejor" que nosotros, Beck propone en este libro "más Europa," como opción para garantizar más libertad, más democracia, más justicia social, una mejor gestión de los recursos y una extensión más equitativa de las políticas sociales.

Tal y como afirma Beck, hay momentos para pequeñas políticas; y hay momentos para grandes políticas. Ahora estamos en uno de ellos. Una Europa Alemana es un libro que anima a reflexionar, a pensar en mundos posibles, en sociedades más justas, en nuevas fuentes de legitimidad del contrato social. Beck habla de "primavera europea." ¿Construida sobre qué valores? Quizás sea momento de que todos juntos y juntas soñemos una nueva Europa.

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