

# COLOMBIA

## Integrating Participation, Leadership and Critical Thinking in the School through Students' Council and Teachers' Empowerment

*María Fernanda Téllez Téllez, Javier Alexis Junca and Carlos Orlando Ramírez)*

### Frame of Reference

Porfirio Barba Jacob is the name of a public school located in the locality of Bosa, in the capital city of Bogotá, Colombia. Since 1994 by law, all schools must have a project that guides their daily activities. The project includes the development of a behaviour manual based on some laws that the school community must follow. These laws are present in the Code of Childhood and Adolescence that aims at “ [...] guarantee that children and adolescents should have the possibility to grow up within a family and a community surrounded by happiness, love and comprehension” (Ley 1098, 2006, art. 1, p.1), and in the preamble of the Convention of the Right of the Child (CRC). Since there is a need at the school to adjust the behaviour manual, our Batch decided to focus on this issue as one of the project's aim.

Bearing in mind the above, there are some questions that we would like to solve at the school level:

- Which pedagogical model is the most appropriate to work at school?
- How can we build a behaviour manual that takes into account the human rights and the laws related to childhood and adolescence?

Furthermore, and as a way to complement the development of the behaviour manual mentioned above, our team decided to focus on Teacher Development. Some workshops were offered to English teachers who work at Porfirio Barba Jacob School and also

to teachers from other twenty-nine public schools in Bosa. These workshops had the intention of raising awareness about CRC, participation, leadership and critical thinking. These workshops took into account English teachers' practices as well as students' learning and understanding of the principles of the convention on the rights of the child.

## Theoretical Foundations

Critical Pedagogy is an umbrella term that encompasses critical thinking and participation; concerns that we deem essential to develop in our project and that we describe briefly below.

**Critical pedagogy.** Our view of critical thinking, leadership and participation is permeated by Critical Pedagogy on libertarian education. Freire and Shor (1987), assert that this education provides a setting that encourages teachers and students to become critical mediators involved in constant learning and action. Therefore, we consider that reflection should be present in teachers' practices and students' learning processes to enhance teachers and students to make assertive decisions and find solutions to problematic issues. That in turns allows them to assume leadership so that they can participate in the context they are living in.

Our CRC project includes participation as one of the main constructs to be implemented at Porfirio Barba Jacob School and other schools in the locality of Bosa. In order to achieve that goal, we emphasized on the importance of listening to students and teachers' views. Their inclusion will eventually transform teachers and students' settings. This process encourages critical dialogue. In sum, taking into account Freire and Shor's (1987) ideas, the promotion of these dialogic exchanges will lead to social transformation.

**Critical thinking.** As we mentioned before, to start working on our project, we decided to use critical thinking as one of the main axis. Due to its importance in the development of critical thinkers, Facione (2007) mentions that there are some critical abilities that people need to develop such as interpretation, analysis, evaluation, explanation, inference, and self-regulation. Therefore, at school students and teachers need to acquire these abilities to think critically about their individual and social life. In addition, it is worth mentioning that critical thinking, according to Paul and Elder (2008), "[...] is the disciplined art of ensuring that you use the best thinking you are capable of in any set of circumstances" (p.7).

At the end of the process we want to have strong critical thinkers at school. This means that teachers and students will be able to analyse and reflect on their skills to try to change their reality.

**Participation.** Participation is part of the three P's-provision and protection- proposed by the Convention of the Right of the Child (CRC) and it means the right a child has to act and the possibility this child has to be involved in decision making. Taking into account this definition, we designed some workshops for the English and Social Science teachers and the Students' Council where we presented an overview of the different articles proposed by CRC. We mainly focused on articles 12 (right of expressing opinion), 29 (develop competences of children), 14 (right of thought, conscious and religion) and 17 (access to information and role of media). Subsequently, the students and teachers had to use of their argumentative competence since they expressed their opinions and points of views. In this regards, they need to be trained on how to express their ideas and provide solid arguments to persuade or convince an audience, being more critical and adopting a participatory position and assuming leadership.

According to UNICEF, "Participation promotes the empowerment and capacity of children to be involved in the decisions and actions that affect them" (p.15). Bearing in mind this definition, it is important to foster students' participation at school. It is essential that students understand and become aware of their abilities to become change agents.

## Purpose (Aim)

Due to our common goal toward visibility and implementation of children's rights in Colombia, we have decided to share our academic, professional and personal strengths conjointly. It is worth mentioning that although we have two target areas to impact, we have one common purpose. Our project intends to raise Social Science and English teachers as well as the Students Council's awareness on CRC through the implementation of workshops and seminars based on the issues of participation, leadership and critical thinking.

Based on the purpose of our project, we stated the following objective:

- To raise Social Science and English teachers and Students Council's awareness on CRC through the implementation of workshops and seminars based on some features of participation, leadership and critical thinking at school level.

## Teacher Development

In order to meet the purpose mentioned above in the short term (the expected outcomes), we decided to sensitize, practice, socialize, monitor the process and develop joint work on the 3 P's, CRC' s principles, through some critical thinking, leadership

and participation activities. Therefore, the indicators to the short and long term that display these actions will be gathered through instruments such as surveys, observation measures and samples.

We carried out workshops every Friday from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the CADEL (the institution that represents the Ministry of Education at the local level), and thirteen English teachers from the thirty schools of the locality attended. It is worth mentioning that only 4 English teachers ended their training process on March 9th, 2012. This was due to the difficulties teachers' faced when they were changed of shift (e.g. a teacher from the morning shift was changed to the afternoon shift). At the end of the workshops, the four teachers were invited to participate in the seminar on Child Rights organized by Professor Astrid Núñez Pardo, from Batch 13. Only two of the teachers presented the materials on CRC they had designed during the teacher development process.



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## Methodology/Activities at the School Level

**School level.** In order to start with the initial steps of our project, we agreed to develop the following actions at school: The presentation of the project on July 22<sup>nd</sup> and the first workshop on Critical Thinking on September 22<sup>nd</sup>. The day of the presentation, we collected information about the teachers' perceptions in regards to the main concepts we had planned to emphasize on. The workshop on Critical Thinking included the teachers' reflections about the concept and what does it entail. In addition, there was a brief presentation about the theoretical bases of the concept. After that, the teachers had the opportunity to develop a workshop and discuss about the topic. Besides, they provided examples of their teaching practices and the reasons why the topic is important in their classes. In regards to the rest of the workshops, we could only hold them when teachers from both shifts had their pedagogical meetings.



In order to start implementing the project, we had to identify teachers' perceptions about the pedagogical approaches. The following survey was implemented using a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 represents *totally agree* and 1 *totally disagree*.

Decide which of the following items fits best with your experience or opinion.

ITEM	1	2	3	4	5
The pedagogical model (meaningful learning) is appropriate for our school.					
The pedagogical model should be changed.					
The pedagogical model today is a traditional one.					
The pedagogical model that we need at school is behaviourism.					
The pedagogical model that the school needs is developmental.					
The pedagogical model that the school needs is Socialist.					
Which one? _____					

Observation:



When we select a pedagogical model or when we decide to change it, the result must be an academic discussion that involves teachers and administrators reflections about the needs and interests of our students and the context in which they live.

The results of the poll made with the teachers were the following:

Figure No1 First question



Figure N°2 Second Question



Figure N° 3 Third question

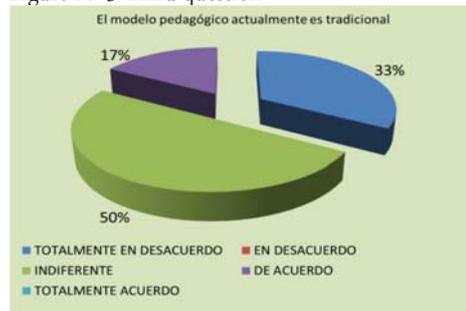


Figure N° 4 Fourth question



Figure N° 5 Fifth question

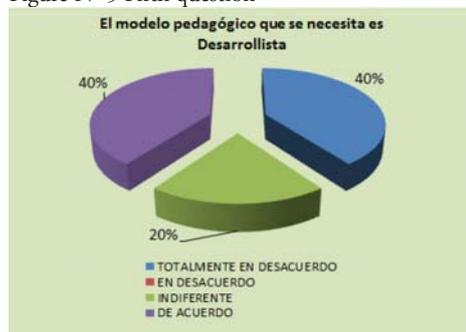
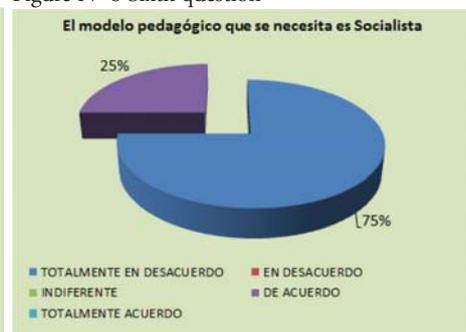


Figure N° 6 Sixth question



The information derived from the previous graphs shows:

57% of the teachers believe that the model that is being implemented at the moment is appropriate for the school, but only 14% of the teachers strongly agreed with it. It is important to highlight that 29% of the polled teachers were indifferent towards this model, maybe because they do not take into account the model to plan and develop their classes. (See figure N° 1)

Less than 50% of the teachers believe that the meaningful teaching model should not be changed (43%). 29% of the teachers agreed that the model that the school has must be changed. 28% of the teachers believe that the pedagogical model should not be changed; they disagreed with this question (See figure N°2).

17% of the teachers consider that the pedagogical model of the school is a traditional one but 33% of them consider it is not, and 50% of the teachers are indifferent towards this question.

There is a belief that most of the educational ideas come from Behaviourism and even more that those ideas work in the classrooms. This question shows us that Behaviourism should be the model (See figure N° 4).

Regarding the Developmental model, 40% of teachers consider that this model should not be used but 40% of them consider that this model should be implemented. 20% of the teachers were indifferent about this question (See figure N° 5).

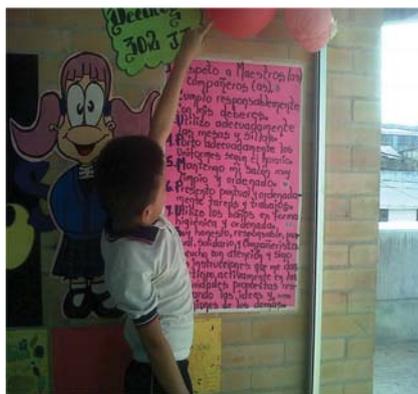
The last question focuses on the idea of a new pedagogical model: the Socialist model. 75% of the teachers answered that they disagreed with this model and 25% of the teachers totally disagreed with this idea.

What can be said about these questions and these answers is that we do not share the same insights about pedagogical models. In addition, teachers believe that the traditional pedagogical model is not adequate to be implemented at school.

Gantt diagram for the activities

Activities	Ja	Fe	Ma	Ap	Ma	Ju	Ju	Ag	Se	Oc	No	De
Poll to teachers									2011	2011		
Analysis of their answers										2011		
Reading about Critical Pedagogy										2011		
Poll to students											2011	
Poll to parents											2011	
Analysis of these polls												2011
Presentation of these results to the community( Institutional week)												2011
Workshop about CRC						2011						
Workshop about Critical Thinking									2011			
Discussion about the new model (Critical Pedagogy)												2011
Writing and adopting the new model	2012	2012	2012									
Writing the new behaviour manual	2012	2012									2011	2011

*The behaviour manual.* The Colombian Law (Law 115 1994, articles 73 and 87) states that each school must have a behaviour manual (discipline rules) that must make part of the institutional project. According to Law 115, this manual must contain rules of hygiene, respect, resolution of problems, the school uniform, rules to elect the school government members and a definition of students' rights and duties as well as the relationship among the members of the community.



The main purpose of our project is to define the basic rights of the students at school and based on those rights, the duties and the pedagogical-corrective measures can be also established.

*Evaluating the pedagogical model (Meaningful learning).* According to the Colombian Law of Education 115, issued in 1994, there must be a project in each school that describes which is the main objective of the school, or what is the main task teachers, parents and administrators should carry out to achieve the objectives set for having an effective students' learning.

Five years ago, the Porfirio Barba Jacob School decided to implement a pedagogical model called *meaningful learning* that seeks to identify the standards of the students in each discipline. With this model, teachers considered that teaching and learning would be more meaningful, but up to now, what the school has in practice is a traditional model.

After being trained in Sweden and taking into consideration all the topics that we studied in Lund, one of the goals we decided to focus on was to change the model that we currently have.

As soon as the problem was identified at the school, firstly, we decided to implement a survey about some pedagogical models in order to analyze which one would be the best choice for the school's objectives that could be included in the mission and the vision of the institution. The main purpose of the school's project is "*The school as one space of participation that helps children understand their rights and improve their social reality.*" It is worth mentioning that the academic teachers' council worked on the elaboration of the school's mission which was created five years ago.

## Methodology/Activities for Teacher Development

Batch 14 decided to work on two objectives that were developed simultaneously and that complement each other. One is related to the actions carried out at Porfirio Barba Jacob School (at the school level), and the second one has to do with the workshops developed with the English teachers in Bosa (at the local level).

Javier Alexis Junca fixed an appointment with William Fuentes, director of the CADEL in Bosa, so that all the principals would know about the project. As a result, Batch 14 presented its project to the principals on August 2, 2011. The director of the CADEL requested the principals to allow their English teachers to attend the workshops. However, the first day assigned to do the presentation of the project, only three English teachers showed up.

Based on this, we decided to talk again with the director of the CADEL and gave him a written proposal of the project including the chronogram and the whole description of the activities to be developed. Consequently, all the workshops were pro-

grammed from August, 2011 to March, 2012 to be held at the CADEL in Bosa and we finally started the Teacher Development sessions on August, 22 (Appendix 1).

In the first workshop, we socialized the project with the English teachers including a general description, the chronogram of the workshops and the topics that were going to be tackled. We gave them this information on photocopies in a folder. We started with *the concept of participation* explaining the ladder of participation and positive discipline. Furthermore, teachers answered a survey (Appendix 2) to collect their perceptions about the concepts we wanted to highlight.

For the second workshop, we continued reinforcing *participation* and the development of *positive discipline*. We reflected upon and discussed with the teachers the children rights and gave them copies of these rights to be taken into account in their teaching practices.

The third and fourth workshops included the presentation of the concept of *critical thinking*. The former was conducted through a brief presentation of the theoretical bases and a workshop was developed which included teachers' participation. The latter, reinforced the concept by asking the teachers to develop some didactic activities to foster critical thinking and its importance among students.

The fifth workshop included teachers' participation by holding a debate to conclude with the concept of *critical thinking* and its relevance in the school context. In order to start the debate, there were previous activities with information related to the topic of discussion to activate prior knowledge and to motivate them to speak. Finally, the debate was accomplished and some reflections were shared on how teachers can foster critical thinking in their classroom settings.

In sum, all the workshops planned were developed according to our agenda. Moreover, we have collected teachers' information about their schools and their e-mails. Likewise, we created an electronic address to establish direct contact with them as follows: [rcrcinbosapublicschools@gmail.com](mailto:rcrcinbosapublicschools@gmail.com) and recently, we have asked them to complete another survey to obtain further information about their schools and how they are implementing CRC (Appendix 3).

## Results

**School level.** The school has been able to motivate students and teachers to reflect upon the importance of evaluating the pedagogical model that is currently being implemented at school.

**Outcomes at the school level.** We expect to continue developing the activities with teachers and the Students' Council to carry out workshops at Kimy Pernía Domicó School. Besides, we believe we will probably achieve all the commitments we acquired and proposed to be done in the project. However, this is a joined work that little by little will involve more and more people and this fact may have unexpected changes.

- To modify the essential information of the current pedagogical model into a new one that considers the school as a space of participation that helps children understand and improve their social reality.
- To raise awareness about the necessity of changing the pedagogical model of the school in order to have an institution that fosters equality and opportunities to think critically.
- To allow students' voice to be present in the classrooms to generate participatory spaces. According to Freire's (n.d.) words (as cited in Canestrari and Marlowe, 2004), the classroom must be considered as a place where new knowledge is constructed and where students and teachers' experiences evolve through meaningful dialogue.
- To discuss and adapt the concept of positive discipline as one strategy to involve parents in the construction of the students' life project.
- To raise awareness and foster participation among teachers and students at school on CRC's principles through the implementation of workshops.
- To design an English booklet with teachers' participation applying the CRC's principles.
- To modify the behaviour manual for the school, taking into account the CRC's principles.

## Teacher Development at the Local Level

**Outcomes.** Additionally to the workshops developed with the 4 teachers that were described above, we have also been able to achieve some additional actions that will be explained below.

We had one meeting with the director of the CADEL in the locality of Barrios Unidos when our mentor, Ulf Leo, came to visit us on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012. We presented the project to the director of the CADEL opening up a space to work with the teachers of this new locality. We fixed another appointment in April of the same year, to work with the teachers. However, due to the change of directors, in all of the localities in Bogotá, we could not carry it out.

Similarly, we fixed a new appointment with the new local director at Bosa locality. We socialized the project and inform him about the work we have been doing with the English teachers. He suggested developing an online course to work with the teachers instead of working with them *in situ*. We have not decided yet to create the web page to develop the workshops. However, we consider it is a valuable piece of advice that we shall take into consideration.

Another very important outcome we want to highlight is the fact that the coordinator of the emphasis on English Didactics for the Master's Programme in Education at the School of Education – Externado University, Professor Astrid Núñez Pardo, mem-

ber of Batch 13, and María Fernanda Téllez Téllez, member of Batch 14, have included CRC methodologies as a research concern to be looked into by the in-service teachers at the Master's programme. This initiative has been greatly supported by the dean of the School of Education.

## Discussion and Reflection

We would like to continue working with teachers and students and motivate them to be involved with the project. Up to now, we believe we are achieving what we have planned which was to see outcomes at short, medium and long run. With the support of the community and the stakeholders, we have been able to awaken students' and teachers' interest towards the school project and child rights, despite the fact, that it is sometimes difficult to meet the goals set due to the dynamics of the institutions.

Sometimes, we expect to have immediate results. It is essential to be patient and tolerant with the obstacles that are found along the process. The main challenges are to change the pedagogical model of the school and to spread CRC's principles in the locality of Bosa through the teacher development program.

Working as a team is a matter of constant learning. The emotional, academic, and commitment from our partners is essential to accomplish the goals we set as a team. In addition, it involves the presence and coping with the strengths and weaknesses that are part of the coexistence of human beings. This implies facing rewarding and difficult situations when working together. However, most importantly is the final aim we have in mind, the children.

María Fernanda Téllez Téllez considers that the project has been a satisfactory learning experience that will lead teachers to develop awareness on CRC and this in turn will potentially permeate the children in Bosa. The commitment in a team is decisive to achieve goals jointly. She has learned many things related to the logistic and general organization of the workshops and teachers' behaviour in public schools. Besides, she considers that the achievement of the project is a matter of constant effort, involvement, learning and self-assessment in which obstacles are faced and overcome. Finally, she points out that the learning process and experience gained so far will favour the further implementation of the project in other schools in Bosa and Barrios Unidos.

Javier Alexis Junca Vargas believes that this is a great opportunity to share experiences and knowledge with teachers who work in Bosa. It is also worth mentioning that these workshops and reflections are at the core of the project. Carlos Orlando Ramirez thinks that this project is an incredible opportunity to change the school's dynamics taking into account the participation of the whole community. Building new ways of interaction and communication are key aspects to promote and to evidence child rights at school.

## Way Forward

After having finished these phases, we would like to continue the implementation of the project at Kimy Pernía Domicó and Barrios Unidos locality. María Fernanda Téllez Téllez and Javier Alexis Junca have been invited to participate in the new seminar that Professor Astrid Nuñez Pardo is organizing which will be held in March 2013. In that seminar Batch 14 will launch the CRC booklet developed by the teachers who participated in the teacher development seminar in Bosa.

## Sustainability of the Project

We will need the help and support from the directors of the CADELS to continue developing our project. Besides, we would like to have the possibility to visit and develop our workshops in different schools such as Kimy Pernía Domicó and in Barrios Unidos locality as other steps to be followed.

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## Appendix 1

### Chronogram of Activities

The workshops will be held from Friday August 26th, 2011 until Friday March 2nd, 2012. The total number of hours will be 24 and the sessions will be held from 11:00 to 1:00 p.m. The following table includes the chronogram of activities that we plan to develop.

Date	Hour	Workshop
August 26 th	11-1	Socialization of the project Brief explanation of the activities Presentation about Participation and CRC
September 2nd	11-1	Workshop about participation and CRC
September 9th	11-1	Workshop about critical thinking
September 16th	11-1	Workshop about critical thinking
September 23rd	11-1	Workshop about leadership
September 30th	11-1	Workshop about materials development
October 7th	11-1	Workshop about materials development including CRC
February 3rd	11-1	Workshop about materials development including CRC
February 10th	11-1	Socialization of teachers' materials
February 17th	11-1	Feedback and implementation
February 24th	11-1	Booklet draft Suggestions and agreements
Marzo 2	11-1	Socialization and presentation of materials

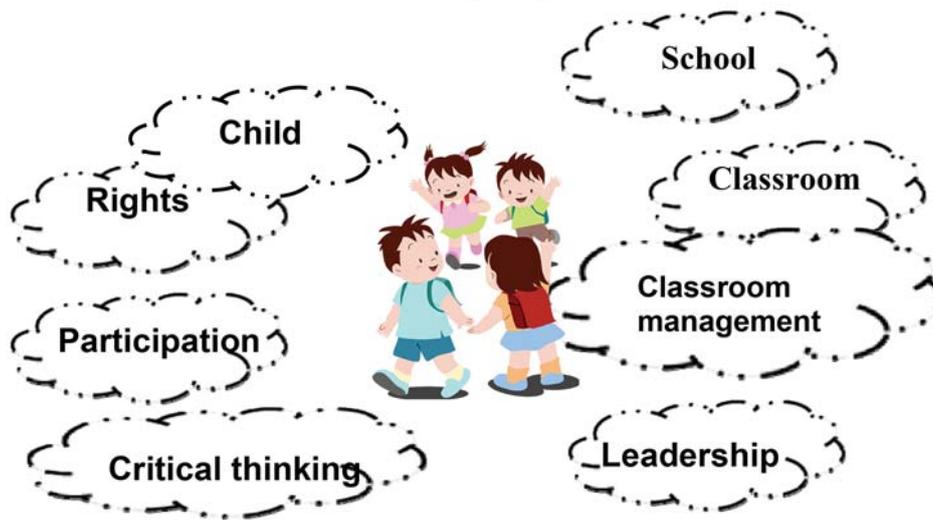
## Appendix 2

First survey about concepts

# Bosa's District Schools

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ School's name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Shift: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Provide a definition for the following concepts.



2. Explain briefly how you integrate these concepts in your daily practice at school.



-I know a lot about the topic \_\_\_\_\_

6. In relation to the Rights of the Child in the Colombian Context

-I know very little about it \_\_\_\_\_

-I have some knowledge about it \_\_\_\_\_

-I know a lot about the topic \_\_\_\_\_

7. Regarding the Methodological Approaches to Create a Child Rights Culture in the Classroom,

-I know some, but I have not implemented them \_\_\_\_\_

-I have implemented several approaches \_\_\_\_\_

-I would like to learn about them \_\_\_\_\_

8. Does your Educational institution or its *Proyecto Educativo Institucional (PEI)*, include the principles of the Convention of the Rights of the Child across the curriculum?

-Yes \_\_\_\_\_

-No \_\_\_\_\_

-I do not know \_\_\_\_\_

9. If the answer to question four is affirmative, who is responsible for the implementation of the CRC principles across the curriculum?

\_\_\_\_\_

10. What does the possibility of attending this workshop mean to you?

-A possibility to explore other methodological possibilities \_\_\_\_\_

-An opportunity to learn about CRC \_\_\_\_\_

-An alternative to implement some pedagogical strategies in my teaching setting \_\_\_\_\_

-An option to carry out research studies/projects \_\_\_\_\_

Other possibilities \_\_\_\_\_

11. What made you decide to attend as participant of this Workshop?

\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for making the time to answer this survey.