

Focus group evaluation of an elective course design

Avaliação em grupo de foco da concepção de um curso eletivo

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ABSTRACT

This research led to determining the relevance of the curriculum designed by our Professional Training School for Teachers in Puebla, Mexico, regarding the dimensions of content and curricular order, based on the experience of students and teachers. The methodology has a qualitative approach; the technique was focus groups, and the instrument was a script of open questions that considered the internal evaluation of the process. It is in our best interest to strengthen the design and implementation of the "Inclusion, Art, Play, and Sport" course as part of a series of community-proposed optional courses. In the experience of students and teachers, the group met the general purpose. The feedback received through the focus groups cut in greater depth for students to identify the collective achievements of all the participants: students, teachers, and curriculum designers. Throughout the study, we identified aspects for improvement, such as rethinking some activities and learning evidence, reducing the amount of information to meet, and establishing a better relationship between the topics and the teaching practices, particularly those related to strategies for inclusion in art and sports.

Keywords: teacher training, focus group, curriculum design.

RESUMO

Esta investigação levou a determinar a relevância do currículo concebido pela nossa Escola de Formação Profissional para Professores em Puebla, México, relativamente às dimensões de conteúdo e ordem curricular, com base na experiência dos estudantes e professores. A metodologia tem uma abordagem qualitativa; a técnica foi focalizada em grupos, e o instrumento foi um guião de perguntas abertas que considerou a avaliação interna do processo. É do nosso maior interesse reforçar a concepção e implementação do curso "Inclusão, Arte, Jogo e Desporto" como parte de uma série de cursos opcionais propostos pela comunidade. Na experiência dos estudantes e professores, o grupo

cumpriu o objectivo geral. O feedback recebido através dos grupos focais cortou em maior profundidade para que os estudantes pudessem identificar as realizações colectivas de todos os participantes: estudantes, professores, e desenhadores de currículos. Ao longo do estudo, identificámos aspectos a melhorar, tais como repensar algumas actividades e provas de aprendizagem, reduzir a quantidade de informação a reunir, e estabelecer uma melhor relação entre os tópicos e as práticas de ensino, particularmente os relacionados com estratégias de inclusão na arte e no desporto.

Palavras-chave: formação de professores, grupo focal, concepção curricular.

1 INTRODUCTION

The 2018 bachelor's degree curriculum in educational inclusion comprises training paths that are theoretical-methodological bases for teaching, training for teaching and learning, professional practice, and electives. The elective courses are theoretical-practical formative experiences that allow the student to focus on a general or specific area of teaching practice, to learn or deepen in various approaches, or some particular aspect of the professional work field (DOF, 2018).

Specifically, the elective course favors diversifying training content for students, responding to needs and interests identified in the bachelor's degree in educational inclusion. In this sense, as a result of the contextualization of needs and interests of the students of the Benemérito Instituto Normal del Estado "Gral. Juan Crisóstomo Bonilla", the elective course entitled "Strategies for inclusion in basic education through art, games and sports" was established, from which the first course "Theoretical-methodological bases of art, games, and sports for inclusive education" is derived.

This course is the first of four that make up the elective pathway of the 2021 - 2022 school year. The general structure of the system consists of two learning units, which describe the purposes of the units, contents, activities, learning evidence, and performance criteria, as well as the essential and complementary bibliography.

The elective courses address specific aspects of training that respond to the demands of the contexts in which the student will perform the teaching profession and respond to the professional expectations of teacher training students.

It is relevant to know the experience of the students who took the course, as well as the teacher responsible for teaching it, for strengthening the design and implementation of the rest of the procedures that will be part of the elective course. With the above, to favor the achievement of the purposes established for the elective system and pathway and to strengthen the graduation profile of the teacher training students.

The general objective of this research is to know the relevance of an elective course from the dimensions of content and curricular design based on the experience of students and teachers. Also, the research questions established: What elements of the content favor the achievement of the purposes of the course? What aspects of the curricular organization tend to the accomplishment of the objectives? The curriculum evaluation collects relevant information about an educational program formally and systematically, leading to value judgments and decisions to reform its elements (Cruz Cardona, 1996).

Curricular evaluation has gone through models focused on the requirements of the graduate profile, school performance, failure, and desertion; others consider evaluation an integral, systematic, and participative process (Larraguivel, 1998). From the first implementation of the elective course by the bachelor's degree, we met an opportunity to evaluate its design through an internal evaluation as part of the necessary process.

1.1 INTERNAL EVALUATION

In the evaluation stage, the structure and organization of the contents and the instructional and methodological strategies of the curricular management and the learning evaluation system are investigated (Salas Perea, 2016). Its purpose is to review the coherence between contents and design and their consistency with the established professional profiles. The curriculum design must translate the purpose of the curriculum and whether the strategies are coherent with the contents and purpose. The prevailing criteria are those of integrality and coherence.

How is curricular integration carried out, with which didactic models, procedures, and strategies? Considering Educational inclusion as a dialectic discipline between theory and practice, in which its didactics is a field of quasi-experimental intervention, in which each teacher elaborates and modifies a strategy, reviews literature, and formulates hypotheses.

Coll (1991) considers the role of teachers in this definition of curriculum: "It is the project that presides over school educational activities, specifies its intentions, and provides adequate and useful action guidelines for teachers who have direct responsibility for its execution."

In the words of Hugo Rangel (2015), "it is necessary that the formal curriculum is not a mere distribution of contents (this means a conventional curriculum) but as a structuring of formative experiences." In this sense, the opinion of users is highly

significant; in terms of Osorio, García, and Sánchez (2021), the attitude toward the curriculum should assess both the teacher and the student. For this reason, a methodology intends to balance the tension pointed out by Ángel Díaz Barriga (2003) between a historical trend of a more student-centered curriculum and a more institution-centered one.

Thus, curriculum evaluation is considered an integral part of the design, "a dimension of the curriculum and not a later stage" (Walter, 1982). This approach allows us to define tasks permanently, allowing modifications to be made over time, following the information provided by the evaluation.

2 METHODOLOGY

This research has a qualitative approach since interpretation is fundamental, allowing the path to the contexts to know and understand the different realities. Therefore, in this approach, the researcher has an essential role in the whole process, which includes: the operationalization of the object of study, the chosen paradigm to approach that object, the selection of the technique, the design of instruments, the collection of information and its interpretation (Stake, 1998).

The focus group is used as a technique since it obtains a wealth of information. In this sense, the role of the interviewer takes a back seat, ceasing to be directive and dominant, thus creating an atmosphere of greater freedom and openness for the participants (Krueger, 1998).

Concerning the sample, this was the totality of students who took the elective course, 30. This group met the criteria of the focus group, such as heterogeneity and homogeneity to have symmetry about the experience in the class, but at the same time, the critical differences to enrich the speech and consequently the opinions (Fabra and Domenech, 2001). The students attend the bachelor's degrees in Preschool Education, Primary Education, and Educational Inclusion.

The number of members in each focus group, as suggested by Krueger (1998), was six, so to generate a point of balance so that all members would have the opportunity to present their opinions and, at the same time, not impoverish the conversation.

The duration of each focus group was 30 minutes, with the intention of not generating fatigue among the participants. Also, this depended on the number of questions, which was six; therefore, it was possible to follow up in that period and fulfill the objective set.

The instrument consisted of six open-ended questions that considered internal and process evaluations (Stufflebeam, 1971). This type of evaluation allows constant feedback on the courses and procedures. Likewise, this evaluation sought to detect defects in the design or implementation process and to provide information for decision-making. The assessment of the process required takes into account aspects such as content and concepts taught, structure, organization, and time.

3 RESULTS

After processing the data, we found the following results. The course aims to have students analyze and reflect on the theoretical references to build explanatory frameworks for inclusive education. Students will also explore and reflect on the importance of arts, games, and sports in the integral development of children and adolescents, understanding the transversality of the current primary education curriculum to achieve an inclusive culture.

In general, what the focus groups suggested to improve the content is a greater emphasis on art and sports, both in didactic sequences as well as in learning evidence. Also, greater transversality between art, games, and sports, not to review them in a segmented way but to make didactic proposals that integrate them. At the same time, some topics could be more theoretical. For example, the teacher included a matter related to neuroeducation as a reference that allowed him to anchor art, play, and sport theoretically.

Table 1. Results from the focus groups

Student's Experience with the Contents	The students felt that the contents of the course allowed them to know and work on aspects related to the game, as well as to put inclusion at the center. They helped adapt their planning concerning the game, taking into account the diversity in the group and thus reducing the Barriers to Learning and Participation.
Relevance for their academic and professional training	In general, the students mentioned that the topics awakened their interest in class since they led them to consider the game as a transversal strategy relevant to their planning process for the practice periods. As a result, they believe that their planning contained methods that allowed them to make their classes more dynamic.
Problem-Solving in the Field of Educational Inclusion	They consider that the course helped them to design and implement strategies and resources that favored inclusion, as well as the identification of Barriers to Learning and Participation. In general, they believe

	that the course provided them with the basis for solving issues in the field of inclusion but that it takes time to solve.
Areas of emphasis	The contents consider theoretical aspects but also have an orientation toward the practice in class. The revision of the contents was different from a traditional vision since the practical element emerged when proposing activities in their practice day planning. They consider noteworthy the promotion of collaborative learning in the activities for the development of the class sessions, mainly because students took the elective course from different degree programs at the Escuela Normal, not only from educational inclusion, which in their opinion, enriched their learning.
Opportunity Areas	They consider that the topics of arts and sports were not in greater depth, as well as focusing more on diversity in the classroom and not only on disability, with exploring in depth the Barriers to Learning and Participation to identify other problems that may arise the classroom context.
Students' Experience concerning the Curricular Organization	Although the professor made an effort to make the course contents practical, they considered that the time needed to be more to review some topics, which resulted in some of them remaining only in theory; for instance, the class did not fully address art and sports topics.
Activities proposed	They were interesting since they followed the logic of reading, analysis, and socialization for their possible implementation in practice. In contrast, some activities were long and should be more dynamic since they sometimes needed more attention. Finally, they stated there needed to be more feedback on some of the activities.
Relationship between the activities proposed	The topic of neuro-didactics seemed disjointed, but when the teacher explained and contextualized it made sense to the students. They argue that an activity on a self-portrait had nothing to do with it; other opinions suggest that the self-portrait could have been a more helpful activity in a more social dynamic and not only as an isolated activity. Finally, they mentioned that they needed to identify actions directly related to art and sport.
Evaluation Criteria	The class considered that the evaluation criteria were clear, and this was since the learning pieces of evidence needed to be more extensive. In addition, it would be essential to have qualitative feedback that would allow them to know their level of achievement.
Opportunity Areas	Regarding the legal approach and inclusion policies, there should be a greater emphasis on strategies and a review of theoretical elements to get to the practice and design of didactic sequences. It was challenging that the students who took the course came from different degrees, not only from Inclusion Education. As a result, some content may be

	repetitive for some students and new for others, but she liked that the students could add inclusive tools to their teaching repertoire.
Teacher's experience with Curricular Organization	The group encountered two situations, the fact that there was a lot of information to cover and that the students were from different educational programs. Therefore, the practice dates varied slightly, reflected in their class attendance. In this sense, the class used transversality, chose a key session, and included three or four topics repeated during the week; in this way, he covered the sessions without missing those absent due to practice days. In addition, the teacher condensed the contents, involving them in a single didactic sequence and practice.
List of the activities planned in the course	<p>The group considers that the planning needed elements. For example, the self-portrait (an activity of the second unit), which is of an emotional nature, should be worked on later; I would link it to the stages of development by placing it in the first unit, not the second.</p> <p>A participant comments: "The order of first play, then art, physical education, and social-emotional education seems segmented to me; when all of this is dealt with together, there is no need to see it segmented; it is better to see it together, all in didactic sequences from the beginning."</p>
On the Evidence and Evaluation Criteria	The group considers that "they should be application activities, already knowing the expected learning, knowing the theory, BLP (barriers to learning and participation), inclusion, knowing how to make a diagnosis, that is the best evaluation, seeing the students make a diagnosis and that we can verify their evaluation skills, how they make adjustments, apply inclusion in their practice." Therefore, the planning was a good practice to adapt it to activities of her didactic sequence, enriched and integrated transversally through games, art, and sports.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The feedback received through focus groups cut in greater depth for students to identify the collective achievements of all the participants: students, teachers, and curriculum designers. Concerning the content, the class achieved the purposes of the proposed topics, from its theoretical foundation to its application, reflected in the planning process through games, art, and sports.

The aspects of the curricular organization that favored the achievement of the purposes of the course were the evaluation criteria since they were clear, and the learning evidence needed to be more extensive.

Socializing and reflecting on theoretical references favored the students to put inclusion at the center, particularly from didactic proposals emphasizing play.

The orientation towards the practice of the contents helped them to identify the BLPs (Barriers to learning and participation) and plan accordingly, acquiring the basis for problem-solving in the field of inclusion. For the teacher, some activities were beneficial, but he faced several situations that forced him to make pedagogical decisions regarding implementing the content.

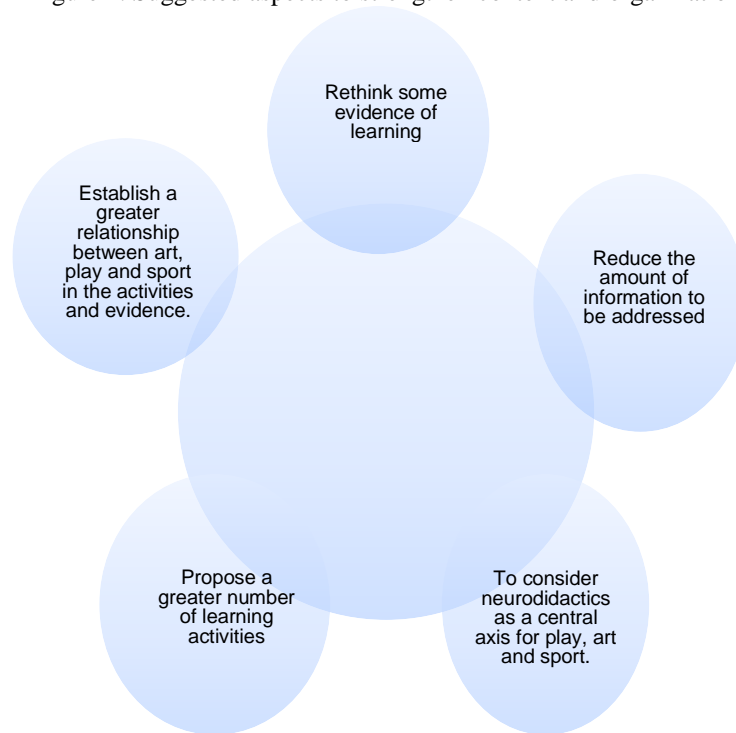
There are suggestions for improvement in the curricular organization related to:

- Reduce the amount of information.
- Insufficient time to cover art and sports in depth.
- To consider neuro didactics as a central axis for play, art, and sport.
- To propose a more significant number of learning activities and rethink some evidence of learning
- To build a more significant relationship between art, play, and sport in the activities and evidence.

The class considered the promotion of collaborative learning in the activities for the development of the class sessions, mainly because students took the elective course from different degree programs at the *Escola Normal*, not only from educational inclusion, which in their opinion, enriched their learning.

Finally, the course and its implementation allowed students to analyze and reflect on theoretical references to build explanatory frameworks for inclusive education. However, "analysis and reflection from experience in their teaching practice on the importance of arts, games, and sports in the integral development of children and youth" was partially achieved since there are arguments to conclude that the integration was insufficient.

Figure 1. Suggested aspects to strengthen content and organization



Note: Prepared by the authors.

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