

## **Initial training in primary education for the management of learning in multigrade groups**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The objective of the article is to propose a system of contents for initial training by systematizing definitions and principles, extracted from searches of other Cuban authors, to group thematic subjects according to the demands and characteristics of the students' teaching practice through the structuring of a subject program "Work in the multigrade", with its methodological orientations, as well as actions to develop in the collectives of years, disciplines and subjects for the preparation of teachers, derived from the application of surveys, interviews, the method of Specialist Criteria and the Pedagogical Experience.

**Keywords:** Multigrades; Learning; Teaching practice; Initial training.

### **Introduction**

The preparation of the student of the Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education for the direction of learning in a multigrade group in Cuba, is based on ideas, points of view and pedagogical conceptions based on dialectical and historical materialism concretized in the Model of the professional and that of the Primary School for which it is formed; fulfilling the requirements of the Third Improvement of the National System of Education, as well as the results of investigations that are summarized in

doctoral and master's theses, which constitute appropriate references for the consultation of teachers and students.

The arguments presented in previous paragraphs have been corroborated in the study conducted for the formulation of the theoretical framework of the research, in which it is evident that the subject has been addressed by various authors from European countries, with emphasis on Spain, England and Portugal; in which it is questioned, that even in the XXI century, the preparation that the future teacher receives, is directed only to his professional performance in pure groups, without taking into consideration the generalities and specificities of learning management in a multigrade group.

Similarly, in Latin American countries such as Colombia, Chile, Dominican Republic and Mexico, where there are a large number of schools with multigrade groups, the preparation of the future teacher is also focused on performance in a pure group.

In Cuba, the professional model and the guidelines of the national career commission for student preparation do not allude to the multigrade group, however, there are several researches on the direction of the teaching-learning process on this subject such as: Carrión (2012); Guilarte (2009); Céspedes (2009); Lissabeth (2007); Labrada (2006); Martínez (2007) and Miyares (2005).

These authors have contributed important elements for the management of the educational teaching process in schools with multigrade groups, at the proposal of this author, their contributions have been assumed and systematized in a study material for students in the Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education, specifically on the management of learning in a multigrade group.

According to this author, they are still not sufficient to solve the problems that occur in the province of Guantánamo, Cuba, since more than 75% of its surface is mountainous and difficult to access, and the largest percentage of its school groups are multi-grade.

Guantanamo authors such as Navarro, Navarro and Robas (2012), provide examples of content systems and methodological guidelines for practicing teachers, which guide them on how to plan classes of Spanish Language, History of Cuba, Civic Education and Geography, through the integration of contents by thematic axes for a complex multigrade, an aspect assumed for constituting adequate references for the consultation of teachers and students in the preparation process, before, during and after the realization of the teaching practice of the third year.

Similarly, and for a better understanding of the problem, a review of the curricula (A, B, C, and D) since (1979) that the career arises, until 2017, as well as surveys and interviews with teachers of the Bachelor's degree in Primary Education, methodologists, zonal directors and teachers tutors of

students of teaching practice of 3rd and 4th years, were carried out, in which insufficiencies were verified; in which insufficiencies in the theoretical and methodological preparation from the career, years and disciplines groups to guide students in their teaching practice in a multigrade group were proved.

In relation to the research, the experiences accumulated by the main author with more than 30 years working in Primary Education, as well as the application of scientific methods such as: interviews, surveys, bibliographic review, the criteria of specialists in a population and sample chosen intentionally of (21) teachers and (16) methodologists, (11) tutor teachers for a total of (48) individuals, all with more than 10 years of experience in teaching, which has allowed determining the following regularities are exposed below.

- 1) Theoretical and methodological deficiencies of students of the Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education for the management of learning in a multigrade group during the period of teaching practice.
- 2) Insufficient preparation of students for the integration of contents by thematic axes in the elaboration of the single class plan.
- 3) Lack of harmonic integration between the methodological and scientific-research teaching work in the different groups of years, disciplines and subjects on the common links that allow giving a professional, logical and coherent output to the contents of the Primary Education curriculum.

This corroborates the existence of a contradiction between: The insufficient theoretical and methodological preparation of the students of the Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education to carry out the teaching practice in a multigrade group and the demands posed by the school model for the direction of learning according to the adjustments of the third improvement of the national education system in Cuba carried out by the Ministry of Education (MINED).

## **Development**

It is considered very important to be able to guide the preparation of the student from an accurate planning in year groups, disciplines and subjects, providing the contents, modes of action and style of work that allow him/her to comply with the different ways and variants of work for the management of learning in a multigrade group, its demands and complexity.

This generality of learning management in a multigrade group focuses its specificity on the specific actions for each type of combination of grades that make up the group, as well as on didactic,

theoretical and methodological procedures that support the actions in this scenario of pedagogical performance.

According to (Rico, 2002) learning is defined as:

(...) process of appropriation by the child of the culture, under conditions of orientation and social interaction", and further on explains "(...) it requires an active, reflexive, regulated process, (...) gradually, about objects, procedures, ways of acting, forms of social interaction, of thinking. (p. 3)

In this regard, the author believes that the existence of learning implies that the information arrives and that the learner is able to operate with it, incorporating modes of action to regulate their behavior or understanding of the environment.

Therefore, it is very useful for the preparation of the student of the Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education in the direction of learning in a multigrade group to know the characteristics of the rural environment and the different variants of work in a multigrade group.

Vigotski (1982); children develop their learning gradually through social interaction, thus the logical process of their immersion in a world of routine and familiar life.

Another of the characteristics that should be assumed in the preparation of the student of the Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education is to understand that there are learning styles that, according to Kolb (1984) "are the learning abilities that stand out above others, as a consequence of hereditary factors, previous experiences and demands of the current environment" (p. 15).

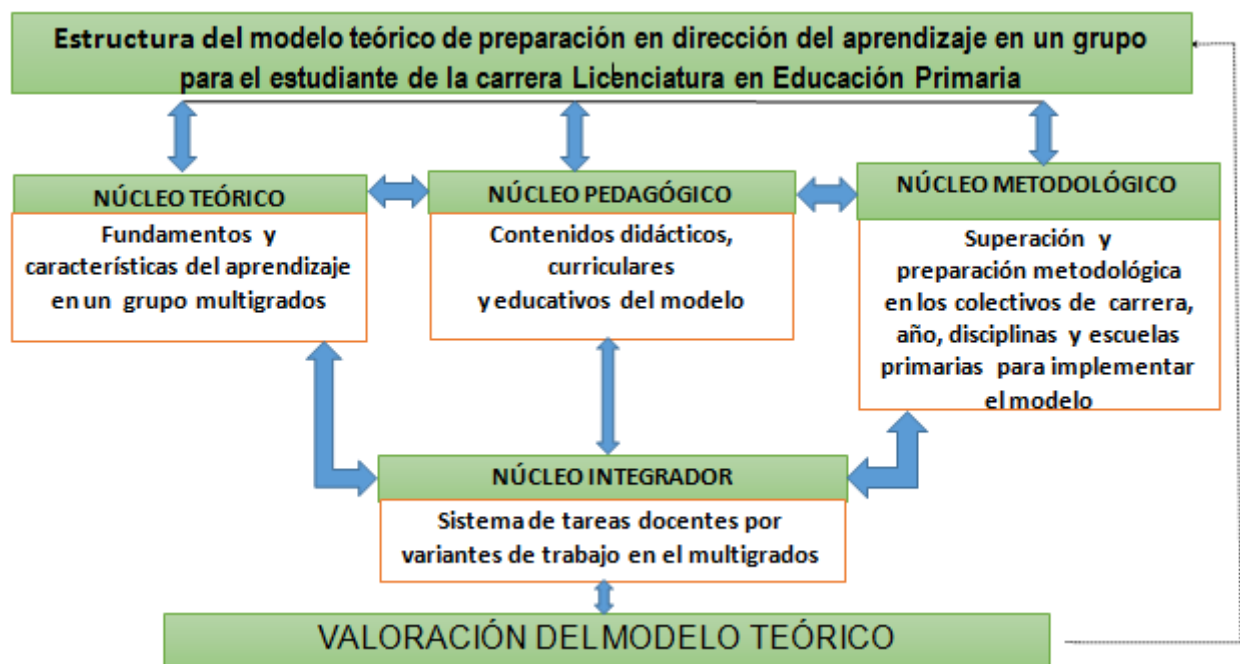
According to the above, it is revealed the development and implementation of a system of contents structured in a subject program for the preparation of the student of the Bachelor's degree in Primary Education in the direction of learning in a multigrade group, according to the generalities of this scenario and its specificities found in the different combinations more than (57), according to the bibliography consulted, as well as the variants of work and the use of teaching media such as worksheets, video and TV, in which the student of the course must apply his knowledge and experience in relation to the coherence between objectives, contents, methods and procedures.

With this objective in mind, a theoretical-methodological model is proposed for the preparation of the student of the Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education for the management of learning in a multigrade group, which is defined as: "A set of categories, principles, requirements, demands and procedures for the preparation of the student of the Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education:

Set of categories, principles, requirements, guiding ideas and criteria based on pedagogical sciences, which guide a system of contents, its theoretical-methodological treatment for the direction of learning in a multigrade group, contextualizing learning theories and systematizing learning styles of schoolchildren, through the implementation of curricular, extracurricular and investigative actions, to meet the objectives of each grade simultaneously.

Figure 1 shows the cores and contents that comprise it, as well as their functional relationships.

**Figure 1:** Structure and relationships of the theoretical-methodological model of preparation for learning management in a multigrade group.



Source: Self elaboration

The theoretical and methodological aspects in the content system proposed for the preparation of the 3rd year student of the Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education for the management of learning in a multigrade group are presented below:

1. Definition of multigrade groups; their classification into simple or complex according to their most common combinations. 2 h/c
2. Elaborate the diagnosis of a multigrade group, as the essential aspects for the direction of learning. 2 h / c
3. Solve didactic problems for the integration of contents as a teaching activity in simple and complex multigrade groups, determining their intra and interdisciplinary relationship, examples according to the diagnosis. 4 h / c

4. Model a unique lesson plan for a multigrade group according to the combination that make it up, types of group and individual teaching tasks, investigative work to be done by schoolchildren in their environment. 9 h / c
5. Elaborate teaching activities with examples of different variants of teaching work for the direction of learning in multigrade groups, implementation or evaluation of the performance of schoolchildren; treatment of schoolchildren with special educational needs. 9 h / c
6. Solve exercises and problems of learning management through audiovisual media and the use of software in a multigrade group. 6 h / c
7. Explain the limitations of methodological work and propose activities to promote learning management of schoolchildren in a multigrade group. 6 h / c
8. Exemplify the main relationships that are established with the community, institutions and community leaders that favor the direction of learning of schoolchildren in a multigrade group 2 h / c
9. Planning and execution of the evaluation system for learning control in a multigrade group, types of open and closed questions. 2 h / c

The program integrates a set of professional skills such as the following:

- a) Recognize what a multigrade group is; classify it into types of multigrades by their combinations.
- b) Support the elaboration of the diagnosis of a multigrade group from the use of logic and diversity, as well as the complexity of the type of multigrade group.
- c) Demonstrate from methodological didactic problems the integration of contents in teaching tasks of a specific subject and its intra and interdisciplinary relationship.
- d) Elaborate learning tasks with different variants of work for the direction of learning in a multigrade group, the forms of control and evaluation of learning.
- e) Plan and organize their study (individual and collective), to achieve a productive and integrative learning using methods of educational research.
- f) Exemplify exercises and problems of learning management through audiovisual media in a multigrade group.
- g) Model a unique lesson plan for a multigrade group of a specific combination of group and individual learning tasks.

For the application of the program, a methodological nucleus is conceived which contains actions aimed at training the teachers according to diagram 2.

**Figure 2:** Methodological organization, showing the logic to be followed in the preparation of the teachers of the year group according to the authors' criteria.



**Source:** Self elaboration

The sequence in which the methodological actions are developed: Methodological Meeting; Methodological Instructional Class (MI Class); Methodological Demonstrative Class (MD Class) and workshops favors a better understanding by the teachers at the moment of preparing the teaching activities in the collectives of disciplines and subjects, which is explained for each of these actions as follows.

The Instructional Methodological Class is planned so that all the teachers of the year group have the greatest possible clarity on how to actually carry out the requirements of the professional's model in correspondence with the specificities of the multigrade scenario.

In the Methodological Demonstrative Class: it is based on how the theories and methodologies of planning the direction of learning from a specific subject or content are fulfilled and that finally a list of bibliographies should be left for the preparation of the teacher and the student.

The logic followed in the whole process from the application of diagnostic instruments by means of survey, interviews, pedagogical experience, as well as the Criteria of Specialists, made it possible to determine the insufficiencies to elaborate and present the set of contents that is represented in the theoretical-methodological Model of preparation for the direction of learning in a multigrade group performing sequential actions such as the following:

1. To determine the current state of the problem of the initial formation of the student of the bachelor's degree in primary education through interviews and surveys that allowed verifying that 21 teachers (19) considered the content system adequate, representing 90.4 % of the total,

as well as 11 (100%) third year students were surveyed and for 10 of them (90.09%) it was satisfactory.

2. To present the system of contents that make up the program in the scientific council and meeting of the career collective, where approval was given to apply it in the third year of the Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education as a subject called Work in the multigrade, of the Proper Curriculum as of 2019, constituting an important curricular modification for the initial formation.
3. To submit the content system to be taught in the initial training to specialists' criteria, in which 100% consider it adequate, as they can develop the skills for the management of a multigrade group before graduating. With a sample of 61 individuals in total, with the following composition: 23 doctors of Science; 38 masters in Education (mention in Primary Education); 23 professors and 5 tenured researchers; 9 auxiliary professors and researchers; 32 categorized teachers; 4 methodologists of the provincial management; 6 municipal methodologists.
4. A definition of preparation of the student of the Bachelor's degree in Primary Education for the management of learning in a multigrade group is provided.
5. The actions of the year groups are exemplified with greater coherence when elaborating the teaching practice guides, applying a methodological preparation system to prepare the students once they have received the system of contents to be faced in the third year teaching practice in a multigrade group.

This study made it possible to compile information subsequent to the development of the teaching practice and to perfect its preparation, from its planning by the professors in the collective year and disciplines to the evaluation of the summaries and reports presented by the 11 (100%) third year students in the practice assets, once this period was concluded, which are shown in table 1 summarizes the most significant ones.

**Table 1:** Main diagnostic results.



Positive aspects	Negative aspects	Interesting aspects
<p>They learn how:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diagnose a multigrade group including the regularities of the rural environment.</li> <li>• Integrate the contents by thematic axes in the subjects.</li> <li>• Organize the teaching schedule and classes according to the combinations of multigrade, according to the variants of work used.</li> <li>• Develop the preparation of the teacher in the collective of year and discipline to integrate the contents in the guide to orient the teaching practice.</li> <li>• Carry out the interdisciplinary work for the presentation of the teaching practice report and its evaluation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The time for theoretical and practical activities during the delivery of the program should be increased due to the need of a greater exercise of the ways to integrate the contents by thematic axes when elaborating the single class plan for the direction of learning in a multigrade group.</li> <li>• Lack of basic and complementary bibliography in flat support to access literature and methodological orientations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The positive attitude of students and teachers in the integration of the contents in a single lesson plan in each subject are not forced, but rather, are adjusted to the variant of work in a multigrade group.</li> <li>• The methodological way of demonstrating how to do this is shown below.</li> <li>• These contents merit a postgraduate course</li> </ul>

Source: Self elaboration

## Conclusions

It is considered that the content system proposed for the preparation of students in the third year of the Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education in the direction of learning in a multigrade group, constitutes an alternative solution, giving an answer to the problem of their theoretical-methodological preparation, since it prepares the students before carrying out the teaching practice.

Coherence is achieved between the training received by teachers in the year, discipline and subject collectives in correspondence with the demands of the professional's model for the completion of studies, as well as that of the elementary school model and the adaptations of the third improvement.