



The standardization in the curriculum educational: the tip of the iceberg of the homogenization

La estandarización en el currículo educativo: la punta del iceberg de la homogeneización

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Received: 2017-01-30 / **Reviewed:** 2017-04-16 / **Accepted:** 2017-04-25 / **Published:** 2017-07-01

Abstract

Taking as a reference the existing literature, through this article intends to make a brief presentation of curriculum standardization and its implementation in the field of education. Standards, taken from the business field, are considered to be a necessary instrument for assurance of educational quality. However, empirical research, as well as critical voices in relation to their applicability, in all educational contexts, emphasize that these cultural homogenized and unify teaching, which does not guarantee an improvement in learning, since it tends to ignore cultural diversity in schools. Standards, taken from the business field, are considered to be a necessary instrument for assurance of educational quality. However, empirical research, as well as critical voices in relation to their applicability, in all educational contexts, emphasize that these cultural homogenized and unify teaching, which does not guarantee an improvement in learning, since it tends to ignore cultural diversity in schools.

Keywords: Homogenization, standards education, culture school, curriculum, assessment.

Resumen

Teniendo como referencia la literatura existente, con este artículo se pretende hacer una breve exposición de la estandarización curricular y su puesta en práctica en el campo educativo. Los estándares, tomados del campo empresarial, son considerados instrumentos necesarios para el aseguramiento de la calidad educativa. Sin embargo, las investigaciones empíricas y voces críticas en relación a su aplicabilidad en todos los contextos educativos, subrayan que los estándares homogenizan la cultura y unifican la enseñanza y que no son garantía de una mejora en los aprendizajes, ya que se tiende a dejar de lado la diversidad cultural existente en los centros educativos. Asimismo, los estándares influyen en la fragmentación y desigualdad académica: aptos (capaces) y los no aptos (poco capaces). Así pues, tanto las investigaciones relativas al tema, como los diferentes planteamientos de los autores, de manera implícita, y en algunos casos explícitamente, hacen un llamado a la reflexión para recuperar la enseñanza crítica pedagógica, en la cual se valoren las actitudes y aptitudes del

individuo, como buenas prácticas para una sociedad del conocimiento de manera inclusiva.

Descriptores: Homogeneización, estándares educativos, cultura escolar, currículo, evaluación.

1. Introduction

This article presents some approaches to the introduction of standards in the field of education. These standards are intended to homogenize the curriculum and its function of measuring learning in students through assessments, because “numbers standardize and relocate the local and the personal within abstract systems of knowledge” (Popkewitz, 2013, P 53). The topics discussed are the subject of a debate between professionals and education theorists. However, both aspects emphasize that the standardization of the curriculum, as well as the evaluation of the learning to measure the knowledge acquired by the students, seek to ensure and control the what and for what of the teaching, due to its ideological implication, for the part of the macro politics. In return, the standardized curriculum can have a homogenizing purpose of the learner’s culture and behavior throughout life. In short, this brief analysis suggests that the result of a standardized curriculum is the homogenization of the teaching criteria and that this homogenization may have potential repercussions when confronting diversity in the classroom (Appel, 1986, Freire 1990, Giroux and McLaren, 1998, Popkewitz, 2013, Hargreaves and Fullan, 2014). That is, the standards project a classic view of education centered on the institutional. Therefore, knowledge is the goal to be reached in the whole teaching-learning process, not counting the daily and communitarian of the individual.

There are great proponents of cultural diversity who stand for a critical and emancipatory pedagogy, such as Apple (1986), Freire (1990), Giroux and McLaren (1998), Popkewitz (2013) and Hargreaves and Fullan (2014) among others. These voices question an education that forms the individual on the basis of a unique cul-

ture susceptible of violating their identity, since they ignore the heterogeneity of the students. Likewise, the different sources consulted implicitly open the question, since there is no consensus on this: is education responding to a public interest, understood and accepted by society as a whole, or is it part of a Technical-entrepreneur ideological machinery seeking development at the expense of a loss of cultural identity? All the opinions and debates that can be opened around the theme also give meaning to education and provide useful tools to improve the educational job.

2. The search for homogenization in the curriculum: a parallelogram between what the teacher should teach and what the student should learn

As a guide to understand the first part of this analysis, we start from the fact of seeing in social, economic, political and cultural transformations, the necessary pillar on which knowledge is built, as well as the processes of knowledge. In other words, the ultimate goal of education is to build competitive advantages in individuals, since the basic resource for society is knowledge applied in the labor field (Quijano, 2005), and its value is measured on the basis of In productivity (social engineering).

In order to face up to this reality, both nationally and internationally, it is sought to homogenize educational processes (curriculum, evaluations, among others), generally in favor of financial capital. Therefore, to achieve this task, technical-instrumental (standard) processes are used to homogenize the educational curriculum and, at the same time, to measure the learning achieved by the students, so as to ensure the



quality of the human product to be inserted, in a future, in the labor market (vision management of education). Thus, education is linked to the service of big capital so that individuals participate through their work performance in materializing neoliberal policies from the different branches of knowledge: sciences, health sciences, social and legal sciences, engineering and architecture, among others (Muñoz, Córdoba, Villareal, 2014). This performance is classified by Casassus (1997) as a *competence*, which is achieved through training or preparation of students to intervene effectively in a work context. Therefore, this competence needs to be demonstrated through evaluations, for example the PISA tests.

Curricular standardization seeks to organize the contents that should be developed in different areas or subjects so that the activities are not repetitive, but sequential and imbricated with previous and subsequent knowledge. This favors the student when the education has business foundations, because the school is considered a factory and the students the product. Thus, curricular standardization facilitates mass production (Taylorist view of education). In addition, standards have allowed humanity to advance in many areas, avoiding chaos and achieving “social and world order” (Luhmann, 1996, p.29), since its application guarantees the quality of the product (the student). This is verified after a standardized evaluation in which the student demonstrates, with the approval of a test, the acquisition of knowledge that enables him to work.

Educational standards are technical requirements that establish a set of norms to implement and manage the curriculum in order to reach the desired quality (Ravitch, 1996, Casassus, 1997, Heras and Casadesús, 2006, Cueva and Rodríguez, 2010). Similarly, Ingvarson and Kleinhenz (2006: 265) add that “standards are tools for emitting criteria on practice in a context of shared meanings and values”, and that they are also instruments of measurement that will describe what will be valued (Ingvarson And Kleinhenz, 2006; NCTM, 1991). To paraphrase Gaulín (2001), the standards are models, and also “standards of quality of a curri-

culum” (Ravitch, 1996) that must be common and homogeneous to be applicable to society as a whole. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (1991, p. 2) describes them as “criteria par excellence”, which will lead society towards a more competitive organizational system in globalized scenarios. In accordance with the above ideas, curricular standards, measurable after a standardized evaluation, allow the State to demand accountability, as well as to know what teachers are expected to teach and students to learn (Casassus, 1997).

Therefore, when setting the curriculum standards, it is intended to homogenize certain educational practices and their processes. The thesis presented by Luhmann (1996) emphasizes that homogenization consists in projecting a cosmos of essential elements that can not be modified because everything comes as a given; its aim is to order reason and try to transform an imperfect state into a perfect one. However, even though homogenization is an “artificial construct like geometry” (Luhmann, 1996, p.29), the standards will attempt to respond to world demands; at the end of the day, society is in charge of assessing its functionality, since only a self-referential system does not require standards. However, in the opinion of others (State, parents, students, society in general), education requires parameters that help to measure their quality, to ask the school to be accountable for the actions carried out and to achieve the desired objectives by the society. Thus, the standardization of the curriculum orders the basic subjects and their contents to be taught by teachers and directives. In this way, humanity is apparently allowed to advance in many disciplines; otherwise, everything would be chaotic.

Having standards means an advance in the quality of a service, as in this case the educational service. However, the individual ends up becoming a product elaborated meticulously and passing through quality controls that can be analyzed (Rodríguez, 1995; Heras and Casadesús 2006, Cueva and Rodríguez, 2010). Similarly, Ingvarson and Kleinhenz (2006) argue that in countries such as Australia, teachers and their associations see the



use of standards positively as a means to improve teaching and ensure educational quality, since both objectives are closely related to the satisfactory results of the students.

This is reflected in the research of Niño and Gama (2013) in two schools in Colombia. Among the results of the study, the authors point out that the use of standards allows the free mobility of students between schools and between cities, and also facilitates the completion of the curriculum and the unification of criteria, themes and concepts on a homogeneous conceptual basis.

According to the Niño and Gama (2013) research, the use of a standardized curriculum ensures what the teacher is going to teach. Similarly, content standardization describes what the learner should learn and how well he or she should learn, since the role of standards is to describe clearly and specifically those skills and knowledge that every student must achieve (Ravitch, 1996; Ingvarson and Kleinhenz, 2006). These standards are basic, as they are determined by the need for everyone to reach the minimum necessary (Ravitch, 1996; Casassus, 1997). Then, the implementation of standards in teaching offers advantages, as it ensures educational quality. The educational center acquires a social commitment whose fulfillment is measurable through evaluations (internal and external). In addition, both families and society know what students can and should learn. In turn, the State ensures that the commercial space has competent professionals. On the other hand, the standards applied to education provide voices and votes to teachers in defining and limiting the nature and scope of their work. This means that all those activities that in recent years have invaded teachers' workplaces, such as assuming certain social needs and bureaucratic procedures, should be handled by other professionals, so that teachers focus exclusively on everything related to their work to increase labor effectiveness and professional development. In other words, standards help to redefine training programs for teachers and improve them (Ingvarson and Kleinhenz, 2006).

In conclusion, the use of standards in the educational curriculum promotes student learning, with high levels of performance. Therefore, its use guarantees that all access to the same programs with equal expectations and with well-prepared teachers. However, as can be inferred, the standards allow schools to compare themselves, sometimes without a thorough investigation of their context of action, to know if the student's performance is in line with social expectations. The school continues to be the product of an industrialization that is developing more and more and is responsible for preparing the population as a competitive labor force for the labor marketplace. According to the liberal clamor, the most important thing is to know if students are learning as much as they can or should, in order to prepare for a university or technical education that is becoming more demanding every day due to accelerated technological changes. All this demands the citizens greater knowledge and skills. Thus, with the incorporation of standards in education, instructional education becomes more important and heuristic learning is diminished. As a result, schools should undertake a process of continuous improvement that will raise the academic performance of students and top the list of schools rankings.

3. The other version of the educational standards: cultural homogenization

The standardized curriculum certainly offers advantages, but the attempt to search for educational quality ends up homogenizing the teaching processes. These become routine, mechanical, and in return, prioritize the results (high school performance, demonstrated in numbers) above the processes. For example, PISA standardized assessments do not evaluate processes, but outcomes obtained by students in areas of basic knowledge (science, math, and reading). However, they leave aside other equally important areas and aspects of education: art, music, factors related to attitudes and values (Santos, 2016).



In this way what is expected of the students is nothing more than to accumulate knowledge to be approved after standardized assessments.

Different scientific research on the subject, such as Lupton and Thrupp (2012) in the European context, point out that educational policies should be more contextualized to improve schools located in disadvantaged areas. This entails creating new standards for schools located in these contexts in order to make visible the similarities and differences between schools. At present the indicators for evaluating schools are limited, as they are focused on measuring and comparing school performance. The standards should be much more achievable for each educational institution. In addition, they must be identifiers of educational failures and then work on their improvement through the exchange of experiences with other institutions located in similar contexts. Resuming the research of Niño and Gama (2013), carried out in our countries (Colombia), the standards are derived from neo-conservative and neoliberal policies of globalization to control knowledge and global and national educational systems. These ideologies, like the organizations, for example the OECD, exert influence in the different countries and promote the measurement and comparison of the knowledge. Therefore, they contribute to the technification of the teaching and the instrumentalization of the evaluations, ignoring the contextual differences and the student multiculturalism, since the ideas of efficiency; effectiveness and competitiveness are more prevalent. In this way the different disciplines are fragmented, skewing the value of diversity and segregating areas of knowledge, since they are not considered fundamental. However, achieving essential minimums means measuring knowledge through a pre-established curriculum, as the technical teacher will be responsible for applying standards. In sum, according to the research by Niño y Gama (2013, p. 196), the standards promote a “de-professionalization and dismissal” of the teaching task.

Consequently, this curricular homogenization in the first instance would benefit those institutions that have more similarities and few differences between them. It means that a standardized curriculum only makes sense in schools located in similar contexts and with a similar reality. In the same way, Luhmann (1996) and Arriaga (2003) admit that a system (in this case the school as an open system) is not observed from the outside, nor is it enough to evaluate its achievements in the same way, but from within, each school is the one that comes to know itself first from its idiosyncrasy. Indeed, a possible reading of the academic performance of students, and therefore of educational quality, is nothing more than an approximation to the life of the centers, but does not describe the reality existing in them; hence the improvement processes demanded from the outside can be very distant from what the educational institution really needs, since each school has a different reading of itself that in many cases does not reflect the standardized evaluations, reason why to evade that reality is to push those centers to exclusion or marginalization. From this reality emerge two social contrasts: wealth and poverty. In other words, there will be students with more advantages over others, schools with better levels of learning compared to others. However, it will not be for lack of intellectual capacity of the students, or for the lack of preparation of their professionals, but for the facilities offered by the social context for the execution of the curriculum. Specifically, we are faced with educational policies that have unified teaching criteria, but which in turn monitor, track and estimate returns, so that only schools with high performance indicators will be worthwhile, and so it is the students who are responsible for taking the institution in the right direction, as they create an enterprise of their own selves (Apple, 2002).

Something similar holds Popkewitz (2013) in his criticism of the PISA tests. The author states that these evaluations are intended to transform the knowledge that a student should have about



a discipline, in pedagogical knowledge. That is, the knowledge measured in PISA has no relation to the practices of scientific disciplines. Indeed, the learning to be acquired by a student can not be adjusted to technical instructions, much less to a measurement system, since these practices underlie labels about “who is the child, and who should be” and on the ways of life that are dominated and/or should be mastered. Consequently, comparisons are made between students within the framework of a pre-established order related to students’ way of thinking and acting, and a real academic work from diversity of the contextual knowledge of schools is not valued (Popkewitz, 2013, p. 19). The school that reflects the best results after the national and international evaluations will be classified as effective. However, those whose social contexts make it more difficult for them to meet the standard will be labeled as failures. Therefore, curricular standardization aims to homogenize the diverse, and evaluations try to compare the incomparable, as we cannot isolate, and even less obviate, the existence of a multicultural society and the influence of context of schools.

In agreement with the previous idea, Gimeno (2004) indicates that the evaluation does not wait for the slow ones, since the times in the education are also standardized. If we evaluate all students with the same indicators and with limited time, we reward the quick and penalize the slow. Consequently, the success of an educational institution can not depend on the information provided by evaluations, whether internal or external. On the contrary, it is necessary to appeal to other criteria much more just and ethical, since in education not everything is evaluable. It is precisely the elements that are not susceptible to evaluation, in the end, that are the most important, and this shows that standardization imposes the rules of the game on collective teaching, on the official curriculum and on the functioning of institutions (Gimeno, 2008).

Standards, in addition to homogenizing, have a technical-instrumental approach to mea-

sure the basic and common achievements that students must achieve. This tendency allows governments to impose values (indoctrinating and controlling the minds of students) with ideological tendencies that benefit certain groups. By imposing these patterns, teaching is also trivialized and the classrooms are standardized, weakening teaching practice and pedagogical transformation. Because of this, the teacher sees himself as an official who applies rules and regulations that are foreign to his daily work. When standards are applied, the aim is to equate schools by ignoring contextual and cultural differences, because content is prioritized and the critical nature of education and the strengthening of attitudes (solidarity, love of neighbor, empathy and collective commitment) as part of the integral formation of the human being. These factors are not measurable in a standardized evaluation (Niño and Gama, 2013), because to paraphrase Popkewitz (2013) there is no universal and undifferentiated whole, but particularities that are manifested in the cultural values of each individual.

Bernal (2014) notes that one way to homogenize is to structure classes by levels, as this makes the learning space easy to control by teachers. As Gimeno (2000) argued clearly, with the grouping of students (in levels, by age, among other criteria), the aim is to normalize what is culturally diverse. This increases and justifies the standards in the curriculum, and even the way teachers work, and this situation leads to a lack of variety of learning environments and little innovation in them. The curricular prescriptions supported by standards, together with the educational policies for their implementation, make clear the perverse of the search for a cultural homogenization in the students (Molina, 2007). In short, “any claim of homogeneity supported by the classification of singular subjects, for so many reasons, is impossible” (Gimeno, 2000, p.88), and is also rejected by the idea of hierarchy that in the end labels the non-classifiable. However, it may be that students learn knowledge quickly, but this benefits the skillful and harms the weaker. Violent



attitudes will be reborn as a response to a possible exclusion. However, issues such as tolerance, equality, respect, essential for the formation of the student, will not be internalized in the same way as the knowledge, because these are lived and practiced in the relationship with others: classmates, teachers, parents, mothers, school community in general.

Consequently, by homogenizing learning and formulating standards as measuring instruments, the system ends up segregating and classifying students. At the same time, the curriculum and the teaching-learning times are taylorized. In the meantime, teachers are specialized, as if it were any profession. In other words, we speak of state control, making clear in which hands is the power (Foucault, 1978, Apple, 2002). So the equality discourse will be centered on the fact that all students must learn exactly the same, with equal periods of time and in identical proportion, something that is utopian and contradictory, because in the end the internal and external evaluation processes end up comparing groups and distributing them according to the criteria considered for the formation of a “public culture”, which are present in the scientific disciplines and serve as canon in the construction of the standards (Pérez 1995, p.7). A good teaching can be educational if it helps the transformation of our set of ideas, but we only remain in providing knowledge to act efficiently on the means of production, increase material wealth but without emancipating consciousness. Education must contribute to cultivating free humans, with reasoning, and endowed with principles. Thus, the passing of standards as a numerical line can tend to teacher failure and student frustration.

Curricular standardization contributes to the homogenization of education because it undermines the principles that should govern the existence of a cultural diversity, since it contributes to the social genetics of a single culture. To achieve this unification, standards are used as indicators of the minimum doses of information that each individual must have in their social

DNA, so that their consciousness as a subject is taken and occupied by the technical-business ideological postulates, which are characteristic of the globalized world. Undoubtedly, straight paths make it possible to achieve achievements quickly with the maximum saving of resources, and the standards give that security if they develop in a uniform way. In spite of it, their results are reduced, as well as the reflection about their objectives and achievements, because sometimes they do not take into account the heterogeneity of the students and the complexity of the social context where they will be applied. As can be inferred, education, which represents a winding road, with curves and slopes that are sometimes very pronounced, is and must be a daily discovery.

The Christianization of a sterilized and homogenized curriculum becomes a manual for catechesis whose purpose is to prepare individuals, who will be baptized as fit or unsuitable for insertion into a society in which they are already immersed from birth. From this, the school is also used to extend moral precepts, not true knowledge, because the individual, like all patients, receives a treatment that will make it more controllable and less free. Under these constraints, education loses its value of transforming social force (Foucault, 1981). In other words, what lies behind a curricular standardization are numbers that are “framed in a set of practices that generate a cultural thesis about who the child is and who should be” (Popkewitz, 2013, p.59). Because of this, the school, with the help of the standardized curriculum, manufactures the student on pre-established social standard by those who believe that they possess the unique culture.

From the above it can be inferred that the school is a “prison without bars” of “guarded education” in which schools are no more than islets controlled from the outside (Grignon, 1981, p.65). It dispenses a theoretical teaching and scarcely related to the context where the student develops its day to day, translating into bookish and superficial, in a store of dates, names and events recorded in memory whose lear-



ning is verified by means of a test (Giroux and McLaren 1998, Santos, 1994). However, in order to understand and recognize the real needs and interests of citizens with respect to their particular knowledge, standards as an instrument for equalizing knowledge are contradictory and leave slits to a superficial and empty learning, because in the end they focus on comparisons that allows more differences than similarities to emerge. As a result, people will be highlighted by the amount of information they store and keep in their memory rather than by their ingenuity and their ability to innovate and solve everyday problems. This will make people competitive with each other, but lacking in generosity, empathy and lack of sensitivity to the pain and suffering of others. Likewise, they will show little love and care for nature, and will also forget that the welfare of the majority is above individual well-being (characteristic of capitalist culture).

Another disadvantage of homogenization is that the schools have a Taylorist appearance of a factory of a scientific nature, because, in Blázquez's words (1999, 79), "we live in a society in which, too often, values as Efficiency, reliability, versatility or speed are sacralized" at the service of the neoliberal powers that make true teaching and management work something administrative and bureaucratic. This gives rise to "heavier work responsibilities and ever-increasing reporting requirements, planning of meetings without end, and in many cases an increasing scarcity of resources, both emotional and physical," useless things that do not respond to real needs of a diverse and multicultural society (Apple, 2002, p.234). In this regard, Santos (1999, 27) emphasizes that "the school is not a business, neither in the nature of its task, nor in the ends, nor in the ideological, political and moral demands", because the business sense of The School evokes a routine and mechanical teaching. Therefore, directives and teachers are, in part, instruments used to put all this scientific machinery into operation. Students become technically capable products that can be patented. This thesis is valued by Apple (1986,

p. 148), stating that "the school is the processing plant and the educated man is the product". Also, Rattray and Parrott (1989) point out that parents also approve these educational programs of technical-business ideology, as this is what allows their children to enter the labor market. In conclusion:

[...] pretending an homogenization simply will not work. We need to constantly ask what the reforms mean for schools as a whole and for each of their participants, including teachers, students, administrators, community members, local activists, and so on. More time and energy are spent in maintaining and improving a public image of a good school and less time and energy in pedagogical and curricular matters (Apple, 2002, p.232).

Equally, there is no doubt that all individuals should have the same opportunities for access to information and the pursuit of knowledge. However, there is no need to ignore the existence of diverse cultural forms. Therefore, there is a need for flexible educational policies that guide and require accountability of educational actors, but leaving the minimum or maximum to reach in the hands of teachers and directives, which are the closest to the child and its environment.

4. Final considerations

The application of a standardized curriculum requires that its use be carried out in a uniform manner, with processes of teaching in numerical line. Therefore, it falls into a homogeneous cultural construction, requiring the human being to adapt to the standards, and not these to it. Curricular standardization aims to form model men and women within a technical-business ideology.

The attempt to homogenize the curriculum demands from the educational centers an organization of educative vision of Taylorist education. However, the school cannot be compared to this type of structure, since the goal of education is the formation of man and woman in an integral man-



ner (knowledge and values) in order to, therefore, seek a better society and the development of it.

On the other hand, implementing some kind of curricular standardization means studying, before, the immediate context in which the educational task is carried out, to identify the external factors that underlie it. These tropisms, on some occasions, represent a turning point for the implementation of any system of accountability in schools, whose only imperative is to measure results of learning with homogeneous instruments for realities that are essentially different. This means that while it is fair that the State and the whole of society know what is taught and how it is taught in school, this cannot be at the expense of obviating the great discrepancies that exist between one context and another. Precisely those differences are those that dismantle any idea of curricular standardization. This standardization does not always prove to be a fair instrument to measure learning outcomes and to equate opportunities when in reality institutions differ in shape and depth from one another because the population component of the school is culturally diverse. In addition, some of the educational institutions are anchored in complex contexts aggravated by their social problems.

However, if the standard is that all knowledge is and must be measurable, then the instruments and techniques that are created for this purpose need a rigorous contextualization in the reality of each educational center, bearing in mind that some factors of the external context do influence the internal processes of schools. In sum, an education with capitalist vision that makes the individual immersed in a world of competitiveness (between educational centers and between students) and constantly selective (schools with low qualifications are considered of low performance), places schools in the showcase of industries, that respects and surpasses each standard as if it were a quality control process, away from the categorical imperative that education pursues: to form innovative men and women,

who do not merely repeat what others profess as universal truth.

It is necessary to question to whom the education system should really be accountable, and simply doing so involves reviewing and redefining the curriculum, pedagogy, planning, methods and evaluation processes appropriate to the different contexts that appearance, simulate to be uniform, but in the background they keep great differences between them. This also means moving away from the bookish that still persists in teaching and its selectivity in terms of its standardized demands, since so many curricular packages and homogenizing evaluators of education systems end up being a manual of catechesis for a process of evangelization and, for that reason, both counterproductive and culturally destructive to individuals and society.

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