

Standardization in education, a device of Neoliberalism¹

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Abstract

In this paper we analyse what standardization is and what it, with special reference to its application in education. For this we also show that standardization is a device of prevailing neoliberal policies. Such policies, contrary to established rhetoric, do not diminish the role of the state and administrations, but rather increase it, by serving as mechanisms for imposing neoliberal thinking and practices. With this framework we analyse two situations in which standardization as a device act. An example comes from the curricular and educational policy of Chile, where the standardization device has a preponderant and fundamental role. The other example comes from the proposal of Universal Basic Skills of the OECD and its relationship with capital knowledge and economic development.

Keywords: *Standards, Neoliberalism, Device, Quality, Assessment.*

Introduction

Standardization and standardization processes have been and still are key elements in our social and cultural everyday life, since, at least, modern times and especially since the industrial revolution. (Legh Star & Lampland, 2009: 27; Busch, 2011; Brøgger & Staunæs, 2016). Urban settings and modern industry have grown on and with standardization pillars, which have become their most precious cement. But standardization due to its own structural and political characteristics has turned (Busch, 2011; Brøgger & Staunæs, 2016;

Brøgger, 2019) into a key *device* (Agamben, 2011) of education neoliberal policies (Angulo & Redon, 2012; Sahlber 2016; Díez Gutiérrez 2018), through the standardization of the school curriculum and the teacher's work (Sleeter, 2005 ; Hursh, 2008, Smith & Kovacs, 2011), through the processes of education assurance (Falabella & Opazo, 2014; Verger et al. 2019) and through the spreading of national and international standardised tests (Hursh, 2008; Kamens & McNeely, 2010; Popkewitz, 2013; Pettersson, et al., 2016). The aim of this paper is to show, through the analysis of two examples one taken from national education and curriculum policies in Chile and international ones from the OECD, how standardization as a device underlies neoliberal policies.

Standardization and standardization in education

As we have just mentioned, standardization has been a key event especially for the modernisation and industrialisation of our societies². Standardization is upheld and promoted as something necessary and precious (Legh Star & Lampland, 2009: 27), even-mistakenly (Unterhalten 2009)³- as a key element for equity in education. It seems as if without a certain degree of standardization, we might not organise ourselves, produce, generate wealth or even understand each other. For this reason, standards become “the ways in which we order ourselves, other people, things, processes, numbers, and even language itself.” (Busch, 2011: 3)⁴. Busch (2000) points out in his analysis that there are various standardization types, as the following table shows:

Goods standardization (<i>commodities</i>)
Workers standardization (uniformity and discipline)
Standardization of markets (in many consumer markets, prices are fixed -they are standardised- and also products and their packaging.
Standardization of the same standards (reliable objective quality measures require the use of mechanisms and methods of standardization which produce consistent outcomes).
Standardization of consumers.

Table 1. Standardization types. Source: From Busch (2000).

Standards may be measured, tested, examined and revisited: they not only have an enormous quantitative function, but they also act as rules under which we should or have to live (Busch, 2011: 10). The *British Standards Institution* affirms: “A standard is an agreed way of doing something. It could be about making a product, managing a process, delivering a service or supplying materials – standards can cover a huge range of activities undertaken by organizations and used by their customers”⁵. We build objective reality through them, i.e. we objectify the world, ensure their stability and permanence: as Busch (2011: 74) states, they are recipes that by the mere act of repetition “of following the recipe (whether faithfully or not), creates a reality that is ordered, regular, and stable”. Standards are not only applied to goods but also to people, what’s more, there is an enormous symmetry between the standards designed for people and for goods, as they are essentially alike and they also function to keep the world of goods and the world of people together and interwoven (Busch, 2011: 4). Standards are then elements for the performativity of subjects and institutions, by providing scripts, ‘manuals’, booklets which guide our practice, but which go unnoticed once they become something natural (Busch, 2011:30) and they are upheld and promoted as something valuable and necessary (Legh Star & Lampland, 2009: 27). This is where an intimate connection between standards and power can be placed, in the same way as rules to be followed are established, or categories to be the basis for decision making, for comparisons and for the selection of courses of action (Busch, 2011: 26). Thus, standardization is a kind of governance, standardising policies or products, and at the same time standardising those who are administered or those who consume them, especially in the social and educational world (Brøgger & Staunæs, 2016: 224; Brøgger, 2019). But we would remain in a mere superficial analysis if we are not aware of two key issues: on the one hand, beyond its daily presence, standards have colonised, paraphrasing Habermas (1984, 1987), the life-world⁶ affecting our subjectivity (Brown, 2015); on the

other hand, standards as political devices (Cort, 2010), have infected politics itself and educational thinking, regarded as devices of the neoliberal economic policies. “Standardization is a form ‘steering and governing’ ensuring that things can be done.” (Brøgger & Staunæs, 2016: 226). In relation to this last idea, instead of understanding standardization as a government technology (Brøgger & Staunæs, 2016; Brøgger, 2019) we want to see it as a device (Foucault, 1981, 1990; Agamben, 2011) as this allows us to place in a more precise manner, the precise framing of the same educational policies that we want to analyse. Let us see in detail what a device is and why this is a useful framing here.

Standards as devices

A device, seen from the point of view of Agamben (2011: 257)⁷ is “everything that entails, in one way or another, the capability to capture, orientate, determine, intercept, define, control and assure gestures, behaviours, opinions and discourses from human beings. Neoliberal capitalism would involve a giant accumulation and proliferation of devices” (Ibid.: 258) which imply *subjectivation* processes, which make them governmental machines (Foucault, 1981, 1990). The most important thing is that a device has *a strategic nature* “the device –Foucault affirms- is always embedded in a game of power, but also linked to a limit or to the limits of knowledge, which give birth to it, although, above all, they determine it. The device is this: power relations strategies maintaining types of knowledge, and [being] maintained by it” (cited by Agamben, 2011:257)⁸. Agamben (2011: 259) summarises these ideas into three characteristics: the first one is that it is a heterogeneous set; the second one is its particular strategic function and the third one is that the device emerges or results from the intertwinement of power and knowledge⁹. “The discourse – material, positive- takes shape in devices... Devices positivity, the fact that they ‘come with’ things, discourses, and people, make visible the non-neutral

distribution of things and bodies (*quadrillage*) in space, organising (the organisational dimension of the norm acquires a completely new relevance) roles and hierarchies of people and functions” (Bazzicalupo, 2010:67).

The utility of the notion of device for research in social sciences and political philosophy lies then in the understanding of the device as those relations of power which spread strategically, starting from a specific rationality with a clear and timely objective –knowledge and power connection-, its implementation is not positive or negative by itself, but rather according to the intended goals.

In this sense, the device joins and ‘materialises’ power, as well as the ruling of others. Let us remember that according to Foucault, *power* is not a substance: power “is no more than a specific type of relations among individuals” which can “more or less determine completely other men’s behaviour” (Foucault, 1990: 138)¹⁰. He adds, “The government of men by men – whether in small or large groups, whether it is power exerted by men over women, or by adults over children, or by one social class over the other, or by a bureaucracy over a population- involves a certain type of rationality and of non-instrumental violence” (Foucault, 1990:139). Here is the key, which Agamben was able to distinguish and develop. *The device is a key element of that certain type of rationality which is imposed on the government of the others*. It is what Foucault (1981:23) names “government over the others”, which implies the development of specific equipment and knowledge. My hypothesis, therefore, is that the form of rationality comes from specific equipment: devices; one of which is precisely standardization in as much as standardization filters behaviours, norms, discourses, proposals, policies and practices. Besides, this device presents itself as a form of knowledge, that is, it relies on knowledge, or indeed, on a particular episteme.

Excursus: Standardization, a device of the neoliberal state

Standardization is and represents a powerful neoliberal governing device in education; it is a machine for the subjectivation of teachers and a key technology for the dominance and homogenization of education practices. Nevertheless, it is necessary to pause and analyse in some detail the relationship between state and neoliberalism, a relationship which might seem to be counter-intuitive in light of the political rhetoric of the anti-state neoliberal discourse.

The rhetoric has stated that the incursion of neoliberal policies has meant a reduction in the state and an expansion of the market (Ross & Gibson, 2006; Steger & Roy, 2011; Angulo Rasco & Redon Pantoja, 2012). Nevertheless, those assumed ideals of a minimum state which were included in R. Reagan and M. Thatcher's administrations, were never accomplished (Gamble, 1988; Angulo 1999; Weiss, 2012: 29); maybe because that was not in fact their aim. In the first place, neither of the neoliberal agendas could have been carried out without the state¹¹, for this reason Todorov (2012) names it as 'state neoliberalism'. It is the state itself which collaborates in neoliberal policies that sweeps public finances and closes social and care services. In other words, it is the state which puts the budgets and public resources at the market interests, that is to say their citizens' life. As highlighted by Weiss (2012) the state has suffered a major transformation as an economic actor, "it appears that the state has long abandoned a developmental role and become instead a (socially invasive) regulator" (Ibid: 29), inasmuch as their regulation patterns have expanded considerably.

"An increase in state power has always been the inner logic of neoliberalism, because, in order to inject markets into every corner of social life, a government needs to be highly invasive.... Health, education and the arts are now more

controlled by the state than they were in the era of labour collectivism." (Gray 2010).

Osborne and Gaebler (1994:64) define it as entrepreneurial *governance* which focuses on controlling the rudder not on rowing; in other words, the neoliberal state makes decisions, controls the functioning of governmental institutions, defines the objectives and results, but does not necessarily implement policies directly. This form of action is called *post-bureaucratic regulation regime* by Maroy (2009). The state then, it needs to be highlighted, is a core instrument for the development and enlargement of the neoliberal agenda. "Commitment to a strong state, -stated by Davis (2018: 273)- capable of rebuffing political and ideological challenges to capitalist competition, is a defining feature of neoliberalism, both as a system of thought and of applied political strategy. There is scant evidence of neoliberal reforms ever leading to a 'smaller' or 'weaker' state in any meaningful sense, even if certain functions have been removed".

But together with the active utility of the state as an economic agent, the conjunction between state and neoliberalism also involves, the adoption of management and control *techniques* experienced in and by large corporations, not only over administrative structures but over citizens, as part of their strategy to make the market become an element for the subjectivity and daily life of the individuals, as it was early pointed by Foucault (1990, 2004) and subsequently reiterated by Brown (2015)¹², in such a way that every individual becomes an 'an entrepreneur of himself' (Davis, 2018: 276), that in the end, grants legitimacy, acceptability and security to market expansion.

At this point, it must be considered that although some authors have defended and supported the idea of an authoritarian neoliberal state (Gamble, 1988; Bruff,

2014) for quite a few reasons, the action of the neoliberal state has been exercised –additionally- in a more indirect way (Maroy, 2008; Baird et al. 2016; Auld & Morris, 2016; Verger, Fontdevila & Parcerisa, 2019) through certain government technologies, which, as it will be later shown, carry out the possibility of exerting and acting on subjects, institutions and groups. These basic government technologies (or it may be preferred, neoliberal governance) are the *New Public Management* (Mathiasen, 1999; Evetts, 2009; Anderson & Cohen, 2015), the Benchmarking¹³ (Larner & Le Heron, 2004), the Audit scheme (Power, 1997; Apple, 2007a), the Accountability process (Hamilton, et al, 2002; Ranson, 2003; Ball & Junemann, 2012; Meyer et al, 2014), evaluation systems through standardized tests (national or international ones) (Kamens & McNeely, 2010; Popkewitz, 2013; Benavot & Köseleci, 2015; Angulo, 2014; Verger, Fontdevila & Parcerisa, 2019) and other similar calculation, assessment/testing and comparison techniques (Steiner-Khamsi, 2003; Torrance, 2006; Tröhler, 2014; Pettersson, Popkewitz & Lindblad, 2016).

Whilst all these technologies cannot be analysed here, what is important, notwithstanding, is to be aware of the fact that there is a device behind all of them, without which they would be null and inefficient. This device is, precisely, standardization. Standardization acts through these technologies in two directions: it is necessary to establish standards to apply them and likewise the same techniques are standardised to be implemented, in our case, in education. As has been mentioned before, neoliberal *governance and control* techniques are nourished by and fed by standardization which in a similar manner standardises the social world, public services and, what concerns us here, institutions, school centres and educational practice (Meyer et al., 2014).

Standards and GERM (Global Educational Reform Movement).

Although it looks like an innovative phenomenon, educational policies which rely on standards, have a long history, although they have not always been shown by means of the same concept. Perhaps we can trace its genealogy back to the beginning of the curriculum theory by Bobbit (1918, 1924) and Chartes (1922) and to the use of scientific management in education by Taylor (1970), and to the reform of behaviour operational objectives in the 1960s (Gimeno Sacristán, 1982; Angulo, 1989)¹⁴. As a follow-up of this historical development it is necessary to embed the present *Global Educational Reform Movement* (GERM) (Shalberg, 2012, 2016), which at the same time gives rise to the spreading of the high-stakes *standardized tests*, at national and international levels (*high-stake testing*). As stated by Shalberg (2016: 130): “since the late 1980s centrally prescribed curricula, with detailed and often ambitious performance targets, frequent testing of students and teachers, and test-based accountability have characterized a homogenization of education policies worldwide, promising standardized solutions at increasingly lower cost for those desiring to improve school quality and effectiveness”¹⁵.

The homogenizing politics mentioned by Shalberg (2016), is precisely what other authors have called *Standards Based Reforms* (Hamilton, Stecher & Yuan, 2008; Casassus, 2010), which are a political product of GERM as a global tendency. Those reforms, which use various technologies, are deployed justly and simultaneously in two areas indicated in GERM: in the field of the curriculum and in the field of psychology measurement or, in other words, in *educational testing*. One especially illustrative example is found in Hirst’s proposal (1987), where he published an alphabetical list of 7,500 concepts/terms which every North American should know, although clarifying that he did not intend with ‘such a list to create a complete catalogue of American Knowledge (sic), but to establish a practical guide for the use of teachers, students and every

person who wishes to learn our culture” (146). This example is a reduced but valid model of the national curricula both in Chile and Spain¹⁶, and in other countries which establish centralized national curricula as essential elements of education policies. Nevertheless, they are not known as knowledge standards under any circumstances, but as learning standards; a concept which has succeeded within the political vocabulary. Apart from psychologizing and individualizing the learning process, (Biesta, 2005), this apparently subtle name change, reinforces the sense of measurable and assessable achievement, and by doing so, it is placed under the umbrella of standardised tests¹⁷. This leads us to measurement or testing fields and to standardised tests. Here, global metrics as those from the OECD exert an evident but subtle influence: as a persuasion device. Global metrics adopted by PISA and the majority, if not the totality, of LISA tests (Large International Scale Assessment), are becoming the device of the curricular device (Popkewitz, 2013; Pettersson, Popkewitz & Lindblad, 2016; Sjøberg, 2016; Addey, 2017; Angulo, 2019).

Performance and reforms based on Standards.

Reforms based on standards (RBE) have the spurious characteristic to offer a story with an enormously simple logic. “The approach is the following – Casassus (2010: 86) argues-the result in education is measurable by means of standardised psychometric tests (the same for everyone). Scores resulting from these tests are performance level indicators and represent a level of achievement of the predefined standard. Thus, a low score according to the predefined level of achievement in the standard, indicates an inefficient performance and a score over the predefined level, means a good performance”. Nowadays this narrative is part of common sense (Casassus 2010) or according to Gramscian terminology it is the *senso comune* (Crehan, 2018)¹⁸ of school administrations, of those professionals, who being distant from schools, work for them. Let us

have a close look to them in order to disentangle their arguably more damaging and pervasive effects.

Falabella (2014), analysing educational accountability, has described very clearly the key elements of RBE, under the designation of accountability for school performance ('desempeño'), just as they are established in Chile. The key here is without any doubt, the concept of performance itself, which has positioned itself on the conceptual leading edge and which disguises the concept of standard. But standards still play an essential role, even when disguised under the concept of performance. This is exactly what matters. Meckes (2007: 355) explains the interrelation between standard and performance, very clearly: standard defines a level of competence which must be demonstrated by a student in a subject area (grade or course), this way the performance related to that standard 'could be classified within a certain category (as competent, advanced, medium, etc.)'. "In the standard the cut-off score is stated, which is the minimum score which should be obtained to determine that it has been attained" (Ibidem).

As shown by Meyer et al. (2004), the process aims to homogenise the heterogeneous reality in education by increasing abstract and unrelated context standards, as well as the corresponding results metrics. For example, among the key objectives for the setting of the Latin American Laboratory Assessment of the Quality of Education, in charge of the implementation in Latin America of the successive tests of performance from PERCER in 1997 until ERCER 2019, under the patronage of UNESCO¹⁹- the school learning standards identification for the region are found together with the assessment of the degree and level of achievement of those standards in the countries (Casassus et al. 1996: 213)²⁰. To put it another way, it is about attaching homogeneity to a context through tests, specifically to the Latin American context which is absolutely heterogeneous

and diverse. The connection between standardised tests and reforms is clear, although it cannot be studied here in further detail (Rand Corporation, 2008: 3)²¹. Falabella (2014) has stated the following PBE characteristics which summarizes and corroborate what has just been pointed out:

- Education results are predetermined by the State.
- Standardised assessment systems for learning outcomes are introduced.
- The results and the consequent quality rating system of the schools are published.
- Repercussions (rewards and sanctions) are set if the predetermined results are not obtained²².

Within this scenario it can be affirmed that education reforms and the very restructuring of education systems, define and stipulate education quality through standards fulfilment (education achievements or outcomes) and their subsequent measurement. The following section shows two examples: a national one which deals with Chilean education system and an international one promoted by the OECD. The reason for selecting these two examples is that the standardization processes act not only at the level of national education policies (as in the case of Chile), but also as a mechanism for supranational imposition of neoliberal policies (as is the role of the OECD). We should also add that in Chile there is strong pressure from the state administration to impose standardization and to ensure for its compliance and achievement. And it is, precisely, due to political pressure, and because of the sanctions imposed to their non-fulfilment, that the Chilean context appears as highly paradigmatic. In what follows we will present first the Chilean case and then the international case of the OECD

Standardization Policies: two examples.

The Chilean context: quality assurance national system.

In Chilean education policies under the so-called Quality Assurance System, several complementary strategies come together putting pressure on schools, teachers and students (Fallavela & Opazo, 2014; Fallavela & Cortazar, 2015). It must be noticed that the Chilean education system has experienced various phases and time intervals. Osandón et al (2018) distinguish 5 phases, such as the following table shows. In this paper, and taking into consideration that a great part of the present initiative stems from the dictatorship period, we will be focussed, nonetheless and exclusively on the so called ‘new education institutionalism’ ranging from 2010 to 2017 and specifically on the Law 20.529, enacted in 2011 and renovated in 2019²³.

PHASES OF THE CHILEAN EDUCATION SYSTEM
Developmental State and curriculum in the educational reform times (1964-1970)
Continuity and new education emphasis during Popular Unity (1970-1973)
Education and curriculum transformations in the civil-military dictatorship period (1973-1990)
Educational and curricular policies under the legacy of the civil-military dictatorship (1990-2009)
New educational institutions towards quality (2009-2017)

Table 2. Taken from and adapted by Osandón et al (2018).

The Quality Assurance Law (20.529-2011)²⁴, supported by already existing tools such as the Good Teaching Framework (MBE), the Good School Leadership Framework (MBD), Progress Maps and the System for Quality Assurance in School Management (SACGE), (Espínola and Pablo Caro, 2010:52), and reinforced by the law on Preferential Subsidies (20.248-2008), already establishes a school classification based on school outcomes as the

auxiliary basic criterion for this classification, also has consequences for schools in case of low performance on the established achievements, including the possibility of closure. Besides, the General Education Law of 2009 (Law 20.370), offers an institutional framework to control and manage education quality with the new created Agency for Quality Education and the Superintendence Education²⁵.

The law 20.529 for quality assurance in its article 2 strictly claims that the Chilean education system will function ‘by means of a set of policies, standards, indicators, evaluations, public information, and some school backing and audit mechanisms’. Notice then that quality –although not defined- is settled with terminal and homogeneous elements, with control and audit mechanisms. In other words, quality is precisely the so clearly measured consequence of certain results. In article 2, the law also adds the gathering of census external tests (SIMCE) and accountability; including legal consequences and a sanction scheme in the case of failure of the established and stipulated goals. It must be understood that whether they are indicators or outcomes, it is about assuring the achievement of learning standards “which are the focus and objective of quality assurance activities” and they act as management components (Espínola and Pablo Caro, 2010: 60-61). For example, article 3 strictly specifies that the system will consider ‘students’ learning standards, related to the general objectives reflected in the law and respective curricular bases; other education quality indicators and performance standards of school institutions and stakeholders²⁶. As it is shown, the State introduces a quality assurance system which ‘far from reducing its power, defines and regulates the rules of the game within the school market’ (Falabella, 2015). Chilean education, not just because of its own framework inherited from the dictatorship (Falabella, 2015; Bellei, 2017; Osandón, et al. 2018; Orellana Calderón et al. 2018; Schneider, et al. 2019), maintains a clearly neoliberal view which has not excessively changed

during the successive governments and which still remains intact. Being a neoliberal education system, it has originated technologies for education whose mechanism has been and at present, still is education standardization. ‘The legal pathway of the democratic transition towards democracy definitely reinforced the implementation of a management model for school administration; it was based on the setting of contexts within the various educational levels of the education system relying on a quality concept linked to performance. A discourse which has progressively allowed for a management and government school system based on school outcomes. This national reform process coincides with a global process where privatization policies converge with *accountability* devices, standardization and evaluation’ (Herrera Jeldres et al, 2018: 9).

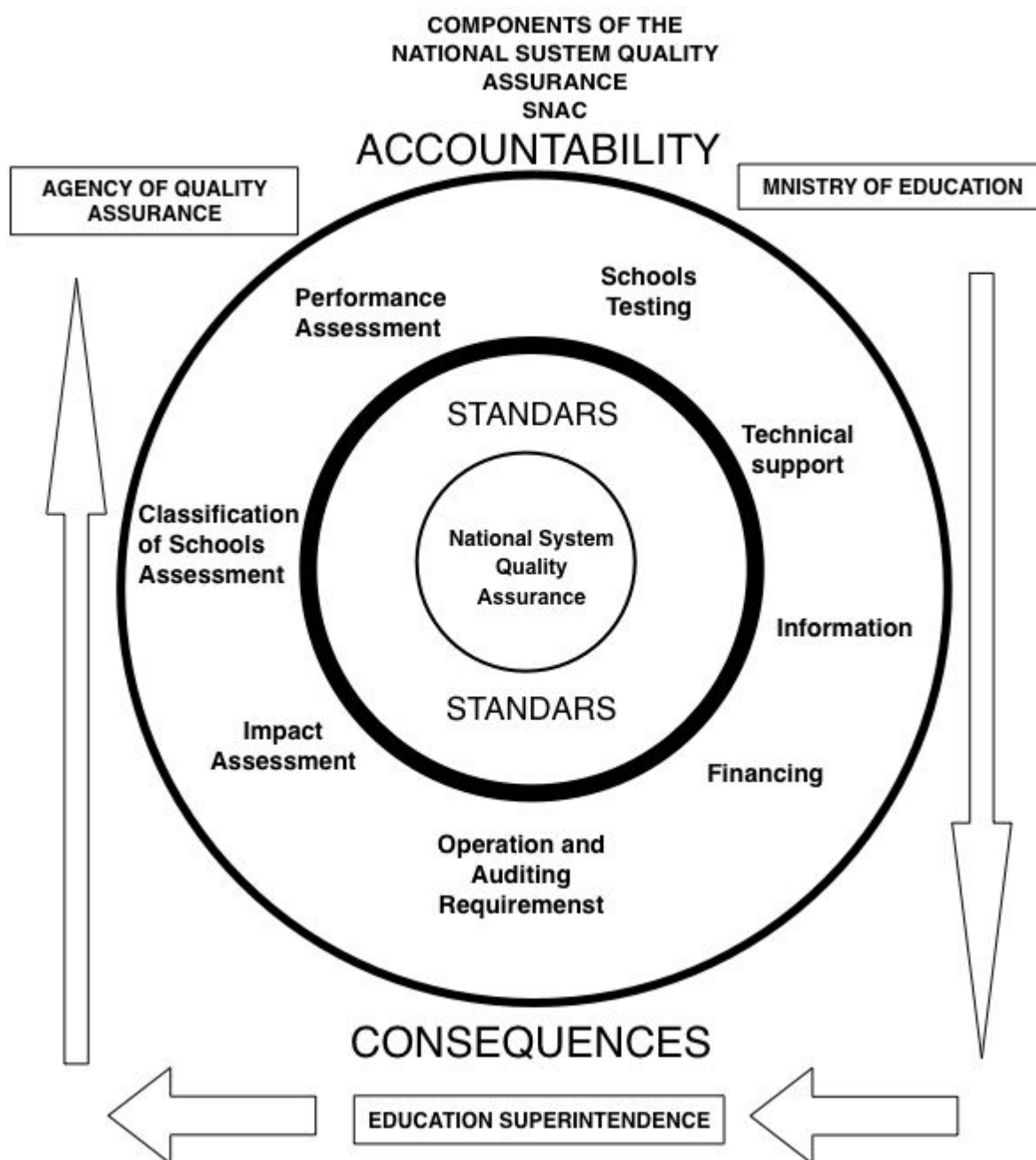


Figure 1. Quality Assurance in Chile. Taken from Espínola and Pablo Caro (2010: 60-61).

The OECD context.

The OECD has been introducing a series of concepts in the education discourse and practice for more than 10 years, which have remained and developed.

DeSeCo Report (2015) for primary and secondary education and the Tuning

report (2003, 2005) for higher education legitimate the idea of *competence* (Angulo, 2009; Angulo and Redon, 2011), in parallel, international PISA standardised tests have been shaped around the concept, inaccurate and sloppy of literacy (Carabaña, 2015). But it has been in this recent decade when the construct *Universal Basic Skills*, has gained an enormous relevance (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015). In spite of the extensive work around the aforementioned construct, there is not a clear and unquestioning definition of it. For example, in the core text BS (Basic Skills) are defined in terms of scores from “the most recently collected international students’ performance tests: the OCDE programme for international student assessment (PISA) and the trends in international Mathematics and Science study (TIMSS)” (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015: 23). BS are also related to “student performance levels which are consistent with workforce required skills in the future” (Ibid. 30), distinguishing between skills levels 1 and 2. The first, level 1 skills represent “the necessary basic skill to participate productively in modern economies”, level 2 skills are baseline skills to “give new learning opportunities and to prepare people to participate in modern market economies” (Ibidem).

What does, then this OECD proposal consider? First, it must not be forgotten that it deals with universal skills, standardised skills for all the countries but particularly for developing countries. Second, these universal skills are measured through two standardised tests: one fostered and established by OCDE and PISA, the other –TIMSS- by the IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) (Angulo, 2019). Third, as it has been reiterated, and presumably shown by Hanushek & Woessman (2007, 2015a, 2015b), the implementation and accomplishment of those UBS mean a considerable achievement for economic development. An achievement so relevant that the same authors point it out as if it were a causal law (Hannushek and Woessman 2016). Fourth, the UBS are in essence the *knowledge capital*,

essential for a prosperous economy. But here there is a twofold problem; on the one hand, it must be clear that UBS are a basic standardization device of neoliberal proposals of the OCDE, to the same extent as they are related with economic development. On the other hand, this standardization offer, which is stated as a kind of global regime, relies on very weak foundations as it has been shown by Komatsu & Rappleye (2017) and Komatsu & Rappleye (2019) given that its statistical rationales are erroneous.

To conclude

In previous sections two particular examples have been described in which the standardization device shapes education policies. The quality assurance system, implemented in Chile, is by itself a standardization device that is not only applied through various technologies, but which is also materialised in this manner and imposes market criteria on the system itself. This illustrates a specific national example of a standardization device in practice. The OCDE represents an illustration of such a standardization device in practice, since by means of the use of UBS it directly poses the need to standardise in order to reach an appropriate economic development of nations. In these two examples, against different backdrops and on different scales education is transformed in the hands of local or global elite experts who are “committed to determine and develop the market efficiency narrative” (Meyer et al., 2014: 2). Indeed, standards-based reforms are tools boosted “by political, managerial, techno-bureaucratic and media elites interested in focussing and maintaining the connection between economy and education” (Casassus, 2010:90). Therefore, it must be remembered in an active way that in Chile²⁷ and with the OCDE indirectly, the standardization device seeks for the elimination of public schools (Hursh 2007, 2008, 2015; Angulo & Redon, 2018), as has happened and is happening in Chile (González, Valenzuela and Bellei, 2010; Barrientos Ilabaca, 2016; Bellei, 2017), and the strengthening of neoliberal subjectivity in future

generations (Brown, 2015). Thus these standardization devices are indeed neoliberals tools.

The danger lies in the fact that even from within the very field of education we accept and think that without standards education might become a weak, confused and arbitrary process²⁸. But it is precisely standards which obliterate any process of dialogue, finding, innovation or creativity in education (Wrigley, 2007; Egan, 2008; Reggio Emilia, 2011)²⁹. It is time to start to dismantle and eradicate them from our aspirations, theories and pedagogical vocabulary and to go back to reconsider curricular and methodological proposals which have been left aside and neglected, in spite of their value; and to start gathering the most interesting ones which have been proposed in the past 10 years (Au, 2012; Paraskeva, 2016a, 2016b; Tienken 2017; Díez Gutierrez, 2018; López Melero, 2018).

Notes

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² We cannot analyse here in detail what modernity is or is not. See Rubert de Ventós (2006).

³ Unterhalten (2009) has differentiated between equity from above and equity from below. The first, equity from above, refers to the way of introducing regulatory actions according to certain rules which will become a reference framework for society. For example, to set schooling for all, to construct public schools, to assure healthy nutrition in school centres, to build technical centres for vocational training, etc. All these initiatives are or must be the responsibility of the State and state administrations, and they are established to ensure that no boy or girl, no youngster is left out of schooling and is given the opportunity to be educated in order to become a citizen. In this case, equity may become a norm, in the sense of the approval of general common laws in education in order to ensure constitutional guarantees for future generations. Standards become here, a generic component, not a particular one, which cannot, or should not go into legislation; neither should they determine pedagogical practice or school life (beyond the adherence to schedules, holidays, or other common norms). The second, equity from below, is the responsibility of schools, and hence of the school community. Such equity involves “some acceptance of a space of negotiation in which particular concerns of groups or individuals on say curriculum content or the form of assessment or the treatment of girls and boys or the approach to management are negotiated not on the basis of majority rule, or the intensity of one person’s view with regard to another, but through a process of reasonableness and reflection that considers each person participating in the discussion has a valuable

opinion, but what is most valued is the process of establishing the considerate and fair relationships that support negotiation, questioning and discussion ” (Unterhalten, 2009: 417).

⁴ A path we cannot go along here is the relationship between standardization and biopolitics and even between biopolitics, social indicators and standardization (Foucault, 2004; Bazzicalupo, 2010; Angulo, 2018).

⁵ From <https://www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/standards/Information-about-standards/what-is-a-standard/> The British Standard Institution defines itself on its webpage as: “the business standards company that helps organizations make excellence a habit – all over the world. Our business is enabling others to perform better”.

⁶ The concept of Lifeworld or *Lebenswelt* was not firstly introduced by Habermas. We should attribute it on a strict view to Edmund Husserl (1960) in Philosophy and to Alfred Schütz (1972, 1973) in Sociology, who in turn took it from Husserl.

⁷ The concept of device was stated by Foucault (1973). See also Deleuze (1990).

⁸ About (*Dits et écrits*, volume III, p. 299).

⁹ For Foucault (1991) the device does also entail four great characteristics: its heterogeneity-as it has diverse components-, the link between its component, its insertion in reality and its ‘way of being’.

¹⁰ Although, he added, “never in an exhaustive way” (Foucault, 1990: 138)

¹¹ Harvey (2007) in relation to neoliberal governments states that there are governmental practices which are divergent and entirely dissimilar.

¹² As stated by Davis: “neoliberalism involves relentless efforts to remake social and political life around an ideal plucked from the market”. (Davis, 2018: 274).

¹³ In Wikipedia the term Benchmarking is defined in the following manner: “benchmarking is a tool designed to achieve competitive (efficient) behaviours in the supply of monopolistic markets which consists in the comparison of companies’ performance, by means of the metrics based on variables, indicators and coefficients (<https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benchmarking>). On benchmarking Lerner & LeHeron (2004) add: “Benchmarking initially involved comparisons within companies to ensure consistency of products, then between national companies to improve the quality of products and processes. Today, the language and practice of benchmarking is ubiquitous, and creates new forms of global inclusion and exclusion. The term encompasses an entire family of conceptually related techniques, and there is a shift from tactical to strategic interventions.” (215).

¹⁴ It must be highlighted that standards intersect, or if you prefer it, they overlap objectives. For example, a learning standards definition is the following: Learning standards are concise, written descriptions of what students are expected to know and be able to do at a specific stage of their education. Learning standards describe educational objectives —i.e., what students should have learned by the end of a course, grade level, or grade span— but they do not describe or mandate any particular teaching practice, curriculum, or assessment method. From:

<https://www.edglossary.org/understanding-standards/>. And a definition of learning objectives is the following: Learning objectives are brief statements that describe what students will be expected to learn by the end of school year, course, unit, lesson, project, or class period. In many cases, learning objectives are the interim academic goals that teachers establish for students who are working toward meeting more comprehensive learning standards. From: <https://www.edglossary.org/understanding-standards/>

¹⁵ From: <https://pasisahlberg.com/global-educational-reform-movement-is-here/>

¹⁶ For example, the Spanish Primary/ Basic Education Curriculum in Andalusia occupies more than 800 pages; in Chile the Curricular Guidelines of 2013 occupy 190 pages (without counting other additional documents).

In either case, may it be for Spanish exaggeration or a moderate position in Chile, a basic curriculum cannot occupy so much legislative space. There must be allowed some scope for action to education professionals and that means that it must be on their hands the possibility to make professional decisions (system objectives, general objectives and wide fields of knowledge) within a common basic framework (Angulo, 1989a, 1989b).

¹⁷ Even as it is emphasized by Biesta (2005: 58), “one of the main problems with the new language of learning is that it allows for a re-description of the education process in terms of an economic transaction, that is, a transaction in which (i) the learner is the (potential) consumer, the one who has certain needs, in which (ii) the teacher, the educator, or the educational institution becomes the provider, that is, the one who is there to meet the needs of the learner, and where (iii) education itself becomes a commodity to be provided or delivered by the teacher or educational institution and to be consumed by the learner”.

¹⁸ Two small examples: “Standards serve as a basis of educational reform across the nation as educators and policy makers respond to the call for a clear definition of desired outcomes of schooling and a way to measure student success in terms of these outcomes.” (National Research Council 2001).

<https://www.library.illinois.edu/sshel/education/edustandards/>

“In response to concerns over the educational achievement of students in the United States, individual states are establishing sets of learning standards defined by grade level or clusters of grades. Curriculum and assessment systems are then organized around these expectations in the core subject areas. In general, standards identify the measurable skills a student should have at certain points in the education path”. <https://publishers.org/priorities-positions/educational-standards>

¹⁹ See <http://www.unesco.org/new/es/santiago/education/education-assessment-ilece/>

²⁰ It is also added the objective to ascertain (measure and evaluate) and to follow up the status of schooling learning levels. (Casassus et al 1996: 231).

²¹ The predominance of results measurement and achievement is known in the Anglo-Saxon literature as High stakes accountability or Performance Accountability. Falabella (2014)

²² The use of resources and /or technical advice for those establishments which obtain an unsatisfactory performance, are also included. (Falabella, 2014)

²³ Although we cannot stop here, we believe that it is important to point out that since the 19th century, Chile has been distinguished by successive popular uprisings in order to create a democratic and popular constitution. (Salazar, 2009, 2011). This history has continued through the penguin revolution of 2006 (Bellei, 2017) and recently through the 'outbreak' of October 2019, starring high school students that spread to the rest of society. This latest outbreak (2019), which has once again claimed among other things a new constitution that replaces the 'imposed' by the dictator Pinochet in and still in force, supposes the assumption of a constituent process again through popular councils.

²⁴ It is important to remember that the 'penguin revolution' was a direct criticism of the Organic Constitutional Law of Education, promulgated by Pinochet on the last day of his mandate. The response of the political elites to this revolution was the approval of a legislative body, among which the Quality Assurance Law that sets the standards stands out. In 2011 there was a new student 'uprising' in Chile, this time focused on the reform of the University. (Rubilar Solis, 2011; Cornejo, 2018).

²⁵ This legal framework, as it is noted by Espínola and Pablo Caro (2010: 55), is supposed to guarantee ‘the autonomy among the institution or agency which sets standards (the National Council of Education) the institution which tests them (Quality Agency), the one which allocates the funding (the MINEDUC) and the one which audits the regulatory use of resources (the Superintendence)’.

²⁶ The Article 7th –states that ‘the President of the Republic will be responsible, every six years, by supreme decree dictated through the Ministry of Education, to establish learning standards, performance indicators and the other education quality indicators related in article 3rd, letter a)’.

²⁷ On the USA reform *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), promoted by Bush's Administration, see Meier & Wood (2004), Apple (2007) and Ravitch (2010). It would be interesting to compare the present reforms in Chile with such neoliberal reform and even with the reform *Race to the Top* (2009) of Obama's administration which set a competition of the states for the budgetary funds and *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015), of Obama's administration, too. These cases are associated with the fulfilment of standards and with the implementation of standardised texts.

²⁸ A report from the Brown Center on Education Policy (Loveless 2012) notes that standards, or as they are also called, 'common core' have "very low impact. The quality of the common basic standards is under debate, but the quality of past curricular standards has not been related to achievement. The rigour of performance standards (which so highly establish the level of competence) has neither been related to achievement" (Ibid.: 12). On the other hand, an example of standards well-intentioned acceptance is found in Levinson (2012:260) when he advocates that high-quality standards are a public good; here once again institutional equity is confused with practical equity (Unterhalter, 2009). See note n.2, supra.

²⁹ See also: Egan (2008), Robinson (2015).

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