

Performance indicators as a strategy for counter-reformist change in educational policy

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Abstract

It is essential, in analyzing the significance of Spain's Organic Law of Education (2006), as well as its associated measures, to be conscious of the lines of broad, hegemonic ideology that pervade Spanish society and the European Union. The market reforms to which the education system is currently subject leads it to incorporate in an unquestioning way a series of concepts and models of analysis the consequences of which are a greater presence of the techniques of measurement and control of everything that goes on inside the classroom. Standardized performance indicators are claimed to be purely neutral and technical in nature, yet they illustrate how new technocratic concepts are intended to manage and control the education system. The language of standardization adopts an assumed concern for issues of equality and social justice, whereas beneath this kind of rhetoric there resides another, utterly different, philosophy. This ideology in fact believes in a higher degree of control and hierarchization of the education system which, moreover, gives rise to a displacement in the decision-making structure. Experts and technical advisors from the State Educational Administration usurp functions from schools and effectively reduce the scope for democratic governance in these.

Introduction

It is clear that schools can, to some extent, be considered as political institutions. Within a school significant dynamics exist that contribute to the reconstruction, reproduction and, indeed, to the very existence of inequalities involving race,

ethnicity, gender, social class, sexuality, disability and religion, all of which are inherent in society. For this reason governments never lose sight of the educational system, and hence political parties, trades unions and practically all social organizations will mobilize, be it through debate or action, whenever a government legislates in this area.

It is therefore essential, in analyzing the significance of Spain's Ley Orgánica de Educación (LOE) (the Organic Law of Education), as well as its associated measures, to be conscious of the lines of broad, hegemonic ideology that pervade Spanish society and the European Union. On one hand, we find neoliberals who are keen to drive through measures that favor the interests of multinational corporations; on the other hand there are the more traditional, conservative ideologies (including those fostered by the governing bodies of the Catholic Church), which are invested in the defense and continual reproduction of current social models reflecting classist, sexist, racist and ageist values. Against such forces we find a conglomeration of ideas expressed through numerous social movements from the left (socialist, social-democratic, feminist, anti-monopolist, anti-racist, ecology movements, etc.), which are committed, in varying degrees, to the fight for greater levels of social justice, and to confronting corruption and new forms of poverty and social, economic, political and cultural marginalization.

Neoliberal positions are those which favor a weakening of the networks that sustain the welfare state and which center most notably on discourses and practices aimed at discrediting and domesticating trades unions, deregulating the labor market, promoting policies designed to privatize the public health system, and securing cuts in state pension funds, amongst others. In the sphere of education, neoliberalism is increasingly effective in helping to strengthen private education. At the same time, it is contributing to the weakening of the public sector. Thus, for example, a raft of measures have been introduced to increase competition between schools and to transform the education system into a marketplace (Jurjo Torres Santomé, 2001), the aim being to guarantee all families the freedom to choose their schools, in full awareness that not everyone has the capability, information or resources to make informed decisions related to education. Moreover, school performance standards,

which involve unjust ranking systems for schools, can lead to a false hierarchy among teachers.

Conservatives often turn to the education system as a means of securing consolidating and perpetuating classist, racist, sexist and homophobic structures. Seen from this point of view, certain aspects of their involvement in educational policy are particularly noteworthy. For example, attempts to maintain as much control as possible over what is taught in the classroom were evident in the kind of discourse emanating from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport during the (conservative) Popular Party's years in office, i.e. through the rushed introduction of legislation over minimum requirements in all areas of compulsory secondary education and the Baccalaureate.* Any number of justificatory arguments were advanced for this purpose, all with essentially the same subtext: that in all areas of the humanities, and especially in history, students exhibited disturbing levels of ignorance. Obviously, the control of the collective memory which these conservative ideologues pursue leads them to scrutinize exactly what is taught in order to impose 'their' versions of the truth as the accepted, unquestionable bases for education at this level.

This imposition of an official, approved body of knowledge is in fact the motivation behind their desire to elevate the importance of the external assessment of the education system. In this way, the draft bill for the Ley Orgánica de Calidad de la Educación, of 2002, (LOCE) (Organic Law of Quality in Education) already made clear that one of the principles underpinning the legislation was: 'to orient the education system more openly towards results, since the consolidation of a culture of hard work and improvements in quality are related to the intensification of the process of assessing students, teachers, schools and the system as a whole, in such a way that each of these can contribute to the process of improvement.'

One of the strategies to facilitate this type of control was to be employed through the formulation of the State System of Educational Indicators, which, according to the LOCE (December 23rd, 2002), would contribute to the 'orientation of decision making in education — at both the school-site as well as the administrative level — towards students and families' (Article 97.1). The National Institute of Assessment

and Quality of the Education System, an organization independent of the Ministry of Education, would take charge of such evaluation (Article 95). This National Institute would be responsible for 'the general diagnostic assessment of subjects and study areas' (Article 96); that is, it would monitor the contents of the compulsory curriculum, specifically in primary and compulsory secondary education.

The Institute would also be charged with overseeing general testing at the end of primary education, to 'verify the level of acquisition of basic skills at this level of education' (Article 17). It was specified that these tests would 'carry no weight in terms of academic qualifications, but would instead be of an informative and orientative nature for schools, teachers, families and students. It was precisely this form of expression — designed to disguise the true intentions of the measures — that allowed the government of José María Aznar's Popular Party to diffuse potential student unrest, because in general students did not perceive the true nature of the reforms.

Curiously, the new Organic Law of Education (LOE), of April 6th, 2006 (as announced in the Boletín Oficial del Estado), has kept this philosophy practically intact, the only difference being that political power is now in the hands of the governing Socialist Workers Party of Spain (PSOE), broadly characterizable as a social-democratic party interested in achieving greater levels of social justice, democracy and equality.

In Article 142.1 of the new LOE, external assessment is once again the preferred option. 'The National Institute of Assessment and Quality of the Education System, henceforth to be known as the Institute of Assessment, will carry out the assessment of the education system, together with organizations under the control of education administrations, which will conduct evaluation in their own areas of competence.' [1]

To effect these objectives, the following article states that the Institute of Assessment, 'in collaboration with education administrations, will develop a State System of Educational Indicators that will contribute to the better understanding of the education system and to help orientate decision making within educational institutions and all other sectors involved in education' (Article 143.3).

Hence, this new law maintains the idea that 'these assessments will deal with basic responsibilities associated with the curriculum in both primary and secondary education, and will include, in all cases, those responsibilities stated in Articles 21 and 29' (Article 144.1).[2] In order to state clearly the intentions of this diagnostic assessment — and notwithstanding that Article 144.3 specifies that 'in no case should the results of these assessments be used for the classification of schools' — three articles below, it is further stated that 'the Ministry of Education and Science will periodically publish the conclusions of general interest arrived at by the Institute of Assessment in collaboration with education administrations, and will make available public information from the State System of Indicators. Also, it is worth bearing in mind that Articles 21 and 29 had already made clear that this assessment 'will be of a formative and orientative nature for the schools and will be of an informative nature for families and the broader educational community'. How, though, will it be possible to guarantee that these results are used for 'formative' purposes only, once they are published?

These measures are entirely new to our educational system, and they will probably serve to influence all elements of the system, most directly and significantly the work of teachers in schools.

The Institute of Assessment, which is responsible to the Ministry of Education and Science, is presented to the public as neutral, free from ideology and, hence, able to develop ideologically neutral indicators and to test its own performance in an equally neutral way. However, in reality this neutrality is not guaranteed, and the suspicion will always remain that the evaluative process will be used by the government in pursuit of its own political interests. Only in the case of there being a number of different assessment agencies, all independent of the Ministry, might the rules of the game be kept even minimally equitable.

Implicit in these forms of diagnostic assessment is a dangerous assumption, one that will be sought by those within this institution to convince the population that assessment is an exclusively technical issue, one unrelated to questions of ideology under debate in society, and one that any professional would carry it out in the same way; that assessment is merely another bureaucratic task. A similar assumption makes

it possible to convince the public that with these 'neutral' assessment outcomes the administration is legitimized in effecting adjustments and reforms in the education system's very structure, transformations that will also be portrayed to the general public as ideologically impartial, the result of technical checks with no objective other than to correct imbalances in the current educational model.

Once again, from a conservative and neoliberal viewpoint, this implies equipping the education system with a business model of operation, legitimizing the transfer of knowledge and skills which operate in the commercial world to that of the classroom.

The danger here is that the techniques of control typical of the commercial world would lead to the demise of ideological debate, which forms such an integral part of education. When the aim is to persuade users of educational services, from students and their families to teachers, that the only problems that exist in the system are of a technical nature, questions of ideology, politics, morality and culture, which have always influenced decision making in education, are rendered invisible to the majority of citizens. As a consequence, the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches is characterized as depending exclusively on teachers and students.

The reality, though, is far different because, as Pat Mahony and Ian Hextall (2000, p.32) note, the form in which indicators are interpreted and exploited in practice varies according to a variety of factors related to the system itself: who makes decisions in the Ministry of Education and in the Institute of Assessment; the assessment model adopted; the groups who figured most strongly in the minds of those originally designing the assessment instruments; those who subsequently evaluate findings; and those responsible for the practical implementation of findings, as well as the context in which any such changes are made.

A good example of how different interests can lead to very different outcomes within an organization is cited by Ernest House (1998, p.64) in his analysis of the Challenger space shuttle disaster occurring in January of 1986. The accident originated seventy-three seconds after take-off from Kennedy Space Center, in one of the rocket launchers, more specifically in imperfections in the 'O' sealing rings that joined

different parts of the launchers. During the investigation into the accident, it was discovered that throughout the development of the project the respective interests of politicians and technicians had been in clear opposition. The engineers warned NASA directors of the dangers of launching, but the directors never fully understood the true risk associated with overheating, and tended to see these technical reports as exaggerated. Indeed, the directors were far more concerned with the political consequences of not launching than with the threat of disaster. At each level of the space agency, the issues of primary concern varied. Whilst the engineers focused on technical matters, those within the political hierarchy of NASA prioritized questions of public image as well as the political and economic interests vested in the launch.

A broadly comparable situation occurred in the Spanish State context with the scores on tests administered by the Ministry's Assessment Agency during the mandate of Minister of Education Esperanza Aguirre, who sought test scores that would illustrate the failure of achievement in humanities teaching in compulsory secondary education. The findings did not in fact reflect the kind of failure sought, yet the Minister had no scruple in reinterpreting the results with a singular bias, so as to achieve a consensus amongst political parties in Spain's parliament and thus effect a profound revision of compulsory secondary education and the Baccalaureate in accordance with her own interests. Amongst the most deeply hidden interests of the political right, which the Minister aimed to translate into law, involved finding justification for setting minimum levels of obligatory knowledge, this in keeping with the ultra-nationalist vision of the Spanish State held by the Popular Party; it involved choosing set topics of study which could best be used to arrive at an interpretation of the past and the present corresponding to the vision and interests of Spain's political right, in power at that time.

This shifting of indicators and standards, which is promoted as an indispensable measure for achieving excellence and quality in education, is particularly forceful when those social movements and discourses orientated towards equal opportunity are divided or weak. In the field of education, such a context arose at the time of the Organic Law of the General Organization of the Education System (LOGSE, 1990), which passed into law during Spain's previous socialist government, without any kind of accompanying provision for its funding.

Over the course of the 1990s, by which time the central government went conservative, the teaching profession slowly came to understand that the Education Administration did not seek to effect true educational reforms through these policies, but to merely to make small changes in terminology and procedural matters, whilst at the same time imposing numerous new requirements on schools. However, neither those movements committed to progressive education, nor trades unions, nor indeed progressive political parties, were capable of mounting a counter-discourse with the power to bring to light the contradictions at play in the educational sphere. Indeed, the political right began to achieve its first successes in the promotion of its conservative ideology with this law, due to changes in its form and terminology. Moreover, the true significance and the effects of their discourses and measures became more difficult to perceive.

The LOGSE, together with the official discourses advanced by the Ministry of Education of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), especially at the time of the enactment of this law, had already established a discourse based on a psychological paradigm for analysis and decision-making in the educational sector. This would only lead to a strengthening of the technocratic approach to educational policy, whilst abandoning as undesirable more complex analyses of the multiple, intersecting variables that run through any educational system.

It is worth recalling that as early as the 1980s, conservative ideologies of the most politically and economically hegemonic European countries had begun to favor a psychological approach to social analysis, not least in the analysis of educational systems. The Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) fell under the spell of this reductionism, and hence when the conservative Popular Party assumed power they discovered that the ground had already been laid. Consequently, they continued in the service of psychology, indeed strengthening its areas of influence, in order to avoid ideologies and the language of the left, given that the natural position of such psychological approaches allows for the construction of analyses based on individual dimensions. This is the time of the 'psychologization' of the subject, of culture and of social problems, which facilitates the implementation of policies of individualization and - something that the right truly sought - of the concealment, indeed the rendering invisible, of politics.

In the 1990s and the years of the new millennium, the rise of neoliberalism has benefited from the success attained by this reductionism in terms of social analysis, and has been able to impose the economy as the benchmark against which all its (mercantile) analysis is measured.

The effects in the educational sector, from its 'psychologization' and the introduction of a neoliberal ethic, have been the concealment of political discourse and analysis, as well as the casting of blame on these; a false depoliticization of education. Politics itself, at least for a very significant sector of the population, not least teachers, becomes identified with the defense of perverse and selfish interests.

New conservative and neoliberal discourses avail themselves of these economic and scientific-psychological perspectives so as to impose their own discourses within the education system. As James P. Gee points out (2005, p.141), discourse in the educational system works as a grouping of related social practices, 'composed of ways of speaking, listening (frequently also of reading and writing), of acting, interacting, valuing and using tools and other objects, in specific surroundings and specific times, such that a determinate social identity manifests itself and is recognized.' They generate forms of behavior; they produce, create and limit models of society in which people are orientated towards living and acting in a way coherent with the essential philosophy which the discourses represent.

The political right, then, reappears with new concepts, such as free choice, competition, leadership and more responsibility for school leaders and inspection bodies, efficiency, and academic excellence; at the same time budget cuts begin to take on the characteristic mark of the neoliberal State, however much those directly affected are offered massaged statistics so that they believe the very opposite of this.

The re-centralization of power and performance indicators

Two words, 'efficiency' and 'excellence', will prove to be key in the discourse which introduces the policy of centralized assessment. However, both concepts will operate within the discourse of education as a sacred litany or as magic words, almost like

Buddhist or Hindu 'mantras'; they have no specific semantic content, but serve both to hypnotize and to mask the intentions of the political forces, conservative and neoliberal, that advance them, words that conceal the obsession for aligning the education system exclusively with the needs of the world of business-capital, and, at the same time, an equally urgent obsession for curbing policies of welfare and cutting economic investment in the education system.

As a consequence, tests designed to measure performance using standard indicators have, over the last two decades, become the dominant techniques with which the involvement of political administrations in the education system is measured, guaranteed and legitimized. Yet they are, fundamentally, being used in an attempt to redirect the process of decentralization with which modern states try to deal with internal diversity and the specific needs of those distinct nations and regions within them. The final years of the twentieth century, it should be recalled, coincided in Spain with a right-wing central government which, in addition to being of a different political persuasion than many regional governments, was obsessed with a new re-centralization of power, a new process of 're-Spanishization' of the State. This explains the fact that the arrival of the conservative government in the nineties brought with it the introduction of these kinds of measures in the education system. In this sense, the obligatory nature of indicator-based assessment for students reaching the end of primary education is one of the most significant features of the LOCE.

Through these politically motivated forms of assessment, the State comes to hold one of the most efficient means of control over the whole education system, a form of orientative control which can be employed in the service of the political interests of whichever party is in power.

Such strategies involving the devolution of powers and the re-centralization of decision-making have been realized with considerable success. A clear example of this can be seen in how discussions over the efficiency and quality of schools have recently become a matter, almost exclusively, of the results of evaluative testing. In the last few years, an example of this situation is the disquiet caused by reports such as the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment), designed and applied by

the OCDE. What receives scarce public attention in current analysis and debate, however, is the question of who exactly the organizations promoting the language of diagnosis based on performance indicators represent; what are their motives, and who belongs to such groups?

The last two decades have seen the invasion of the positivist language of efficiency in public institutions, and hence in educational institutions: quality, management, indicators and standards, efficiency, responsibility, profitability, competition, the marketplace, free choice of schools, privatization, the ranking of schools, employability, schooling checks, outcomes — all of which are concepts promoted by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the ERT (European Round Table of Industrialists), the International Accounting Standards Foundation (IASB)[3] (Jurjo Torres, 2006), the OCDE and similar organizations. Such institutions can be characterized as seeking to accelerate the implantation of exclusively economic neoliberal models and, hence, as contributing to the weakening of welfare policies. In short, they are the motors of the commercialization of the education system (Jurjo Torres, 2001). The emphasis with which governments, particularly conservative ones, exploit the well-known 'Three E's' ('Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness') (Christopher Pollitt, 1993) as a means of promoting their market-orientated policies and reductions in public spending are quickly coming to infect social services and, thus, education.

Effectiveness is the ability to achieve objectives. It has to do with organizational capability, with the ability to make decisions and accomplish tasks at the right time. It is not always synonymous with efficiency. Efficiency is related to productivity; it is the measurable relationship between results achieved and the resources and methods employed.

Both dimensions have as their primary aim economic growth. However, practical experience shows that if indeed economic growth is the necessary condition for a reduction in inequality and social injustice, such growth in itself does not guarantee these. We might bear in mind, for example, that these three 'E's', which are fundamental in the organization of private education, do not necessarily embrace issues of justice, honesty, equality of opportunity and the quality of resources; neither do they attend to the inequalities arising from social class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality,

language and religion. A school located in a slum area or in an isolated rural setting, with poor facilities and teachers who are unprepared for the situation and also possibly demotivated, is not the same as a school in the prosperous district of a large city, where students tend to come from families which are economically comfortable and culturally and socially well-positioned, and where schools tend to have good facilities and highly trained, motivated teaching staff. Clearly, even the most minimally rigorous assessment must take into account the mass of possible variables here.

The market reforms to which the education system is currently subject leads it to incorporate in an unquestioning way a series of concepts and models of analysis the consequences of which are a greater presence of the techniques of measurement and control of everything that goes on inside the classroom. The classroom again becomes the main and indeed the only focus of attention; the quality and effectiveness of what goes on there becomes the sole responsibility of the teachers and, under the opportunistic banner of the individualistic society, the students. Other forms of explanation and causality are silenced, and as a result those within political and administrative spheres are freed from any responsibility.

Standardized performance indicators are claimed to be purely neutral and technical in nature, yet they illustrate how new technocratic concepts are intended to manage and control the education system. They are, equally, a good example of neoliberal policies in education and, more specifically, of measures aimed at a 'delegation of powers' (Jurjo Torres, 2001). The State and its obligations fall away in order to allow for a market in which all responsibilities are located in schools and, consequently, in teachers. Nevertheless, the State retains strong control over matters which most concern those in power, especially aspects of the process which influence the consolidation and continuation of their political project.

Before us, then, is a new concept of education, one typical of the neoliberal political right; the great inspiring slogans of progressive educational policy, based on the construction of a more equitable society, with greater degrees of social and educational equality, are left behind. What is now taken as a working reality is the existence of a natural inequality, for which society bears no blame; in the same way,

the State assumes no responsibility in addressing this situation, in redistributing opportunities. The culture of competition to which this new neoliberal right is committed evolves in a social landscape beset by difficulties for those who find themselves least well-placed. We are competing in a kind of obstacle course in which different competitors face different obstacles, with those schools suffering from poorer conditions (health, food, culture, care and attention) naturally finding themselves confronting an unfair and impossible form of competition.

The term 'indicator' has many meanings, depending on the context of its use. The related term, 'standard', understood exactly as it is used in the literature in English, takes us into the quasi-military context, in that it establishes a desire for uniformity, in behavior as much as dress, precisely as hierarchical authority demands. In the world of business, there exists an explicit need to accommodate production within certain specific parameters, with the aim of ensuring that the product satisfies consumers, who effectively verify its validity and (perhaps) its usefulness in the marketplace.

The language of indicators takes us towards ideals of uniformity, penalizing difference, cleansing away diversity, and thus attacking the very notion of what should be a democratic society. How is it possible that, during the Cold War, those countries that represented a capitalist paradise and who criticized the uniformity and totalitarianism of communist states (it was said that in these countries everyone dressed in the same way, and that schools taught the same subjects at the same time...) have now become obsessed with imposing on their entire school population minimum curricular content and the use of uniform evaluative indicators?

The language of standardization adopts an assumed concern for issues of equality and social justice, in the sense that it is claimed that it ensures all children receive the same education, whereas beneath this kind of rhetoric there resides another, utterly different, philosophy. This ideology in fact believes in a higher degree of control and hierarchization of the education system which, moreover, gives rise to a displacement in the decision-making structure. Resolutions about teaching and learning are dictated from outside educational institutions, without the involvement of teachers, students or their families. Experts and technical advisors from the State Educational

Administration usurp functions from schools and effectively reduce the scope for democratic governance in these.

The concept of an indicator appears also to have at its base the desire to show that it is formulated upon a consensus, one which represents ideas and questions of a universal and impartial character, and of which there is general and complete agreement. It is a concept which does not easily allow for the appreciation that in fact an indicator normally represents and legitimizes specific opinions and knowledge of interest only to certain social groups or professional bodies. Hence, a problem which ought to occupy the attention of society when indicators are proposed, is: who decides on them, and why; who will not participate in their definition, and why not; from the multiplicity of indicators available, which ones are chosen to be obligatory, and for what reasons?

It is worth bearing in mind that the discourse on indicators habitually avoids issues such as the conditions in which the work of a school takes place and, especially, the social background and characteristics of the student body. Perversely, it is assumed that in current society equal opportunity is already guaranteed and that major forms of discrimination simply do not exist; thus, what remains of exclusive import is performance, or, what amounts to the same thing, the fruits of individual effort.

The obsession for diagnosing levels of achievement fails to take into account the starting point for this process; there is no obligation to ascertain what exactly a student knows when he or she enters a particular stage of education, nor at the commencement of those specific years when the student will be subjected to testing, all of which gives rise to a mode of assessment in which the inherent unfairness is flagrant.

The predictable effects of performance indicators on students

The language of standardization, the basis of the work of the Institute of Assessment, is seemingly motivated by a concern for issues of equality and social justice, and with the aim that all children receive a quality education. Behind this approach, however, lies a very different philosophy, an ideology that seeks greater control and

hierarchization of the education system. Policies of standardization result in a very hierarchical power structure, and lead to a strong dualism in the school system, with some schools tending to get good students and others left with the more problematic ones, typically from working class families, ethnic minorities or poor immigrant groups.

Research findings concerning the repercussions in the education system of the assessment of students based on standardized indicators (Linda M. McNeill, 2000; Peter Sacks, 1999; Christine Sleeter and Jamy Stillman, 2005; Kathy Swope and Barbar Miner, 2000) tends to identify the following fourteen collateral effects:

1. The scope and content of the curriculum is reduced. Instead of focusing on their students' interests when making decisions about course content, teachers tend to favor those aspects that impact directly on successful performance in the respective indicators of evaluative testing that they know the State looks at. A policy of indicators, the majority of the time, serves to trivialize the cultural content of a school's teaching program. It contributes to the strengthening of 'economically viable' knowledge, to borrow (in translation) Paulo Freire's term. At the same time it necessitates casting out half a century's work towards a more directly significant and 'relevant' kind of knowledge offered to the student. Learning comes to be equated with the mere memorization of discrete bits of information, which is easy to assess through objective testing. Other forms of learning require more complex evaluative approaches, and this kind of 'wasted time' is not something to which the market will respond.

In countries where such measures have been implemented, indicators generally focus on the most traditional subject areas, this in turn requiring forms of individual study based on memorization. Other school objectives are thus largely overlooked, objectives such as the student's socialization; his or her development as a citizen; the degree to which she or he assumes social and political responsibilities; the student's level of self-esteem, understanding of, and compassion for, the less fortunate; his or her degree of ecological awareness; extent of commitment to the fight for freedom and democracy; development of skills necessary to learn how to learn; amongst others.

The bureaucratic control of the performance of the student body leads to an impoverishment in the ways that a school works, prioritizing exclusively the memorization of that information most likely to be of use in answering questions during testing. We note that indicators, to the extent that they will be subject to a process of quantification, simply exclude in their formulation important aspects of learning which are not measurable in this way. We might think, for example, of the difficulty in using indicators to assess the critical capability of students, or their ability to appreciate different perspectives during the study of certain cultural phenomena. Neither can it be said that students' values in a general sense are strengthened through the kind of teaching in which the yardstick of indicators is ever-present.

With such controls, the task of educating a student to be more creative, independent in judgment, of sound moral judgment, and committed to a more just, united and democratic society is relegated to a secondary position.

2. Coursework becomes excessively fragmented, not only the subjects themselves, which become disjointed, but in terms of study topics, particular classes and memorization lists. It is a way of putting greater emphasis on the well-known summary section to be found at the end of each section in many textbooks.

This leads to a simplification of topics and a culture of anecdotally presented knowledge. Any knowledge that the student brings to the learning experience is no longer necessary, given that what is to be strengthened is the memorization of 'batteries of information'.

This fragmentation of the curriculum takes students away from a more relevant form of learning; it does not allow that cultures and interests be contemplated in school work, and consequently, it is unlikely to stimulate the interest of the student, nor convince him or her of the need to make an effort in studying.

As a result of the obsession with testing, personal and social knowledge becomes detached, indeed, divorced, from the kind of knowledge acquired at school; thus, daily work in the classroom no longer involves ethical and political concerns such as the language of criticism, reflection on the hidden interests behind the knowledge being

learned, investigations into the motivating interests underlying the institutions that surround us, or the professional and interpersonal relationships that we construct.

3. Conflictive aspects of knowledge are avoided in favor of a false consensus.

Standardization reduces the quality and quantity of what might be learned in schools. There is a tendency to omit topics of current interest from class work, those which could lead students to question and debate issues of an open, social nature, given that teachers are aware that these will not be the object of testing.

Instead, the memorization of facts and formulas is preferred, since this will form the basis of tests. All complex questions will tend to be left out. For example, it would prove very difficult to evaluate issues surrounding the concept of 'learning to learn.'

4. Those cultures which have traditionally been ignored in schools become yet further marginalized. The powerless voices of women, the working classes, people with physical and mental disabilities, ethnic minorities, nations without a state, homosexual culture, voices from the third world, youth culture, religious beliefs other than Catholicism, ecological concerns... It is highly probable that these will all be especially badly affected when indicators are formulated by governments or legislative teams of a conservative leaning.

5. Children's learning is compromised, especially when learners come from working class, unemployed or impoverished families, or from disenfranchised ethnic minorities. To the extent that the perspectives of these silenced collectives are not promoted through the curriculum, we can predict that test designers will be equally likely to overlook these learners' needs, and unwilling to invest in the technicalities involved in developing a more diverse range of tests appropriate for differing social contexts.

Test contents tend to become trivial, as well, as is also the case with the philosophy behind curricular projects in the classroom. Thus, school work becomes disconnected from the local community and from the world of the student.

Since the student groups cited above tend to under-perform on such tests, they are more likely to see themselves as forced to attend public school (given that private schools are highly selective with student enrollment). This de facto form of segregation will no doubt lead, in turn, to a false but very widespread deduction: that teaching in public education is worse than it is in the private sector.

We might even restate here that no neutral, universally valid performance indicators exist, nor can they exist independently of the surrounding cultural context. Thus, it is probable that different diagnostic tests will yield different results according to context. In addition, external exams generate stress and anxiety in many students, and for this reason alone are not wholly appropriate as instruments of assessment. Moreover, such nervousness over exams tends to be more prevalent in students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, given that they are often accustomed to less stimulating environments, with fewer adults to encourage intellectual growth and stimulate self-confidence.

To work with students from disadvantaged backgrounds or from ethnic groups with no voice or power in society requires teachers with greater training and resources. Teaching in these schools involves dealing with so much diversity in the student body that it is simply unfair to believe that test scores and achievement levels comparable to those from schools with students from more privileged backgrounds and a higher overall level of acquired culture will ever be attained. Overlooking this situation leads us to conclude all too easily that the teaching staff in such schools are worse than, for example, those of elite, private schools where students naturally stand the greatest chance of obtaining the highest scores in testing.

In the end, schools in marginal or otherwise disadvantaged areas become stigmatized as inherently bad, whereas in fact all that is reflected in such situations is the enormous social inequality of opportunity in broader society. The social context which forms and conditions the life of these schools is overlooked, from the social class of the student body, their ethnicity, religion, language used at home, the cultural resources to which they have access and living conditions at home, to the support and affection received from their families, or their level of self-esteem.

Hence, the evaluative process leads to a distortion in the perception of individual students' test results and of the school's overall achievement. These differences are attributed to questions such as the effectiveness of teaching methods or the effort made by each student, given that the need to address issues relating to a fair curriculum, equal opportunity and levels of social justice, do not emerge naturally from test results.

The imposition of a market model of operation in any field will generally lead to those with greater resources gaining yet more, rather than effecting a more equitable redistribution. In education, such a process gives rise to a greater concentration of better students in schools with more and better quality resources. The consequence is that society becomes yet less cohesive, with greater social inequality.

6. A return to the most traditional and authoritarian teaching methods is fostered. The policy of assessment leads to a legitimization of those approaches to teaching which work best in terms of reinforcing specific information and knowledge, such as that needed for tests; hence, teaching becomes more traditional, based to a large extent on the use of memory, the most pertinent and efficient approach given the context. This in itself can be seen as a retrograde step, a return to authoritarian notions and, consequently, as a direct attack on more participatory and reflective teaching methods.

Teachers, rather than choosing to work in the classroom with integrated teaching units or projects that might allow for the introduction of the most relevant and significant topics and values for the student, opt instead for lessons that guarantee good standardized test results.

It even leads one to think that such measures have as their aim the revitalization of both the positivistic evaluative process, and the failed, indeed, the impossible, behaviorist model of pedagogy, based on the formulation of operational objectives and skills. We ought not to forget that if an indicator is going to be quantitatively expressed, it will demand a formulation that is not only very definite and fixed, but which, in so being, will bring about a deterioration in what the student needs to

study, e.g. the memorization of decontextualized information bits through lists, classifications, etc.

The desire to promote a richer kind of learning, focusing on complex cognitive skills such as reflection, analysis, and the evaluation of information, the ability to work in a group, to collaborate, to debate, as well as the strengthening of creativity, led in the past to a relatively strong consensus in the educational sector, including the need to develop more qualitative forms of assessment, and to find ways of closer, day to day monitoring of each student. This kind of learning requires a fostering of teaching methodologies and strategies of assessment that attend not only to coursework as studied in the classroom, but also to cognitive processes, developmental dimensions, as well as the social, emotional and moral elements involved in the broader aspects of teaching, learning and existing in society.

Most teachers are aware of the difficulties involved with assessing school tasks dealing with open issues. In such cases, an exact match between marks obtained and real merit or effort is difficult to. This in itself gave rise to the notion of more qualitative assessment, with valuations such as 'makes adequate progress' and 'needs to improve.' Without doubt, if more precision in an exam is desired then this can only be achieved at the cost of setting more specific, closed questions, as in the case of multiple-choice test formats. Yet, how might the imaginative and creative capacity of a person be measured with indicators that are susceptible to exact quantification? How might the ability of a student to explore problems with no single answer or solution be assessed?

Measurements using indicators require a great deal more precision, hence their obsession with mathematic objectivity, which itself allows for a hierarchization and classification of the student body, of teachers, and of schools, although I do not consider that today anyone can truly believe that in this way one can evaluate what students are really learning in schools.

There is no longer any sense in talking about the open and flexible curriculum, other than as a kind of empty marketing slogan. With the introduction of indicators, discourse on flexibility, autonomy, integration and collaboration comes to an end.

These concepts disappear or are rendered vacuous, their true meaning lost, as are the philosophies that motivated them and made them attractive and inspiring concepts.

7. The use of the most standardized text books is reinforced, especially those books oriented toward test topics. In addition, a greater degree of external control over class work is exercised by the Administration and its business 'partners' who are slowly monopolizing 'school learning' and 'official learning.'

It is predictable that as a consequence of the culture of testing, a new kind of textbook will emerge, one of great value to the student: books with tricks or indeed with answers to help pass tests, in the same way that books exist to help pass the kind of personality tests used by many companies, and books to assist those wishing to pass the driving test. [4]

8. The main concerns of teachers will again become those of discipline and the culture of effort. When coursework and learning tasks are less significant or relevant to students, they become bored and are more easily distracted, which one might imagine will lead to an increase in disruptive behavior and, as a response, to a hardening of discipline in schools. Given that the emphasis, for both teachers and students, will be to focus all matters on guaranteeing good results in standardized tests, concern over quality in teaching and learning strategies will be relegated to a secondary plain because the overriding goal will be to keep overall school performance scores high on the diagnostic assessment scales.

Such measures are also the surest way of promoting in the student body a credit-based culture. Marks and certificates become the only end to education and to the educational system itself. What matters is to obtain a diploma.

Equally, one can predict that teachers who teach those age groups in which testing takes place will feel a notable unease, tension and anxiety, given that their colleagues, as well as students' families, will see them as responsible for their children's achievement. It is no surprise that in schools where the two age groups undergoing testing are enrolled, the teaching staff are often the least experienced,

whilst those with seniority prefer to work with age groups whose achievement is not so closely scrutinized by the wider academic community.

The effectiveness and quality of teacher work is conceptualized, defined and evaluated by the Institution of Assessment; the efficient teacher will be he or she whose students score well on tests.

9. Teachers' freedom is limited, leading to a prescriptivism and centralization in decisions over coursework, with the subsequent effect of the de-professionalization of teachers. There is an imbalance in decision-making when resolutions about teaching and learning are dictated from outside educational institutions, without the involvement of teachers, students or their families. Groups of technical experts from the Administration are usurping power from schools, thus limiting the democratic governance of the same, and replacing it with purely bureaucratic management.

The discourses and practices promoted through curricular policy based on quality standards very seldom respect the autonomy of teachers. If we accept that every class of students, and indeed every individual student, have inherent idiosyncrasies, and that what is fitting and conducive to learning in one classroom might not be so in another (given the specific history and context of that class), then we must also recognize that the rigid development of educational goals and, consequently, of the methodological strategies that underpin performance-indicator policies, do not render such lines of educational policy easily defensible. Success at school requires strong teacher autonomy, so that they can adapt to the conditions in which they work and respect the interests of those people in their classrooms.

It is essential that strategies promoted and used to improve quality in educational systems should respect the need for autonomy amongst teachers, in the same way that at the university level, freedom of thought in both the professor and the student are essential requirements.

However, techniques employed in the process of deriving indicators place excessive blame on teachers by effectively laying at their feet all responsibility for identifiable deficiencies of students in their charge; in this way the very teachers themselves are

disciplined and required to adopt certain forms of behavior in the classroom, to use more authoritarian, didactic approaches, and to concentrate exclusively on those areas of the curriculum that the State is bound to oversee and which are coherent with what we might call 'official learning.' If we suppose that in every field of knowledge there are many open topics, with conflicting perspectives, the definition of indicators and the tests designed to measure them can very easily serve to impose on schools an official form of thinking, that echoes perspectives that the State labels as valid and correct. We are facing a new attempt to impose an official culture, an interpretation of history and of humanity's present state in accordance with the interests of the most conservative ideologies. We ought not forget that during the mandate in Spain of the Popular Party, in an attempt to reinterpret certain periods in of our recent past and to continue undermining the claims of the respective historic nationalities — especially those supported by nationalist parties in some of Spain's regions — a media bombardment was first employed to convince society of the presumed failure of Humanities teaching in secondary education, after which new compulsory subjects were imposed, with not the least debate or even token moves towards consensus with groups or social movements, other than those directly affiliated to the Popular Party.

10. There are those who defend the policy of standards as a means of 'stimulating' bad teachers. It is claimed that good teachers are unaffected by testing, whereas the findings of numerous studies in other countries make it clear that even the best and most experienced teachers find themselves forced to adapt to the use of certain coursework and methodologies that accord with forms of assessment. Such policies, then, oblige all teachers to opt for artificially simplified curricula. Of sole import is that which counts on tests.

We are seeing a clear return to the discourse of competition and hierarchization characteristic of models of capitalism which had, in the last few decades, been replaced, at least in terms of the prevailing discourse, by notions more strongly focused on collaboration, solidarity, democracy and social justice. When analyzed more deeply, this also implies a return to authoritarianism and to forms of structuralization involving social class, sexism, racism, homophobia and religion, all of which are taken as natural processes in social organization. It is highly likely that

competition between and within schools will become the basis for survival strategies and for obtaining funding from the Administration.

11. Relations between teachers and the Administration will always involve suspicion, even fear. The Administration appears as coercive, threatening and sanctioning, hence becoming something to hide from, and from which problems are concealed. Its bureaucratic and impersonal dimensions are thus compounded.

It is also worth bearing in mind that the policy of using indicators is, moreover, a reflection more generally of policies based on distrust in, and suspicion of, teachers, whose assessments of students are by extension considered to be unreliable. The use of standard indicators might even prove attractive to otherwise progressive teachers, as a means of monitoring assessment practices in the regulated private sector (which is partially state-funded) — i.e. religious schools, teaching cooperatives, and other forms of non-state establishments — a sector which tends to be more 'generous' with final evaluations and grades than the public sector.

12. Standardized test results contribute to the construction of a ranking system for schools. Such rankings, it is easy to imagine, can circulate freely in the mass media, not unlike the rankings of restaurants from the Michelin Guide. What will not be forthcoming from the public administrations, however, is a debate that might put into question the kind of classification based on such standards. The general populous, as well as a certain percentage of teachers, are unlikely to realize that whereas these rankings are derived from test results which include some clearly important indicators, the absence of other equally important indicators (which would lead to a very different hierarchization) is never debated or discussed.

The school-ranking process ends up creating excessive anxiety in teachers, who are all too aware that schools obtaining low test scores quickly acquire negative labels. This anxiety in itself would imply that the schools and staff are not receiving adequate support from the Administration. In fact, if social pressure for good test scores is strong enough, a possible consequence is that teachers might find themselves falling into traps such as screening and enrolling only those students who are most likely to

perform well on the tests: a practice known as 'cherry-picking' or selecting 'the cream of the crop'.

If issues of class, ethnic origin, religion, gender and family background are overlooked when a school seeks to obtain respectable test scores, then those groups of students coming from socially disadvantaged and marginalized communities will become a burden to be off-loaded; such students risk being seen by schools as a serious threat to the highly guarded public image of the school, and it is entirely possible that socially pernicious strategies surface here, such as enacting legal loopholes that bar potentially low-scoring students from enrolling in a school.

It is important to bear in mind that the results of evaluative testing do not reflect the success or failure of a school, but instead merely whether students answered certain questions correctly or not. They do not tell us whether if these students have been wasting their time or learning a great deal. Real success or failure in any educational project involves considering the starting-point, that is, what students knew at the beginning of the period under assessment.

A good example of the political use of indicators is that of assessment carried out in May of 2005 on sixth-year students of primary education in the regional administration of Madrid, governed by the Popular Party and presided over by Esperanza Aguirre, former State Minister of Education and Science. Through the application of tests seemingly designed to objectively evaluate those performance indicators in the areas of mathematics and language, one of the most aggressive and unjust attacks on public education, students and public-school teachers was launched. What is more, some test items were lacking in rigor and there was no democratic transparency in the design process. They were, moreover, applied to all schools, with no concern for clearly conditioning variables such as school context; availability of instructional and other resources; the range of teachers and other professionals employed; the profile of the student body; the integration policies developed by each institution; or the class, gender, ethnicity, countries, cultures, languages and religions most representative of each school under assessment. That is, equal treatment was given to that which was truly unequal and it was concluded, erroneously, that the best schools and students came from the private sector. It was

made public that of Madrid's top hundred schools, according to these tests, only twenty were public; in other words, that the system of public education was bad, the kind of assertion that neither the World Bank, nor the International Monetary Fund - to cite two international institutions most supportive of the private sector - would make without qualification.

Having made public these findings, Madrid's education administration made no announcement as to how it planned to support low-performing schools in order to rectify the shortfalls detected within them.

13. The cost and bureaucratic weight of the education system rise. The move towards diagnostic assessment through testing, and towards measuring achievement against official indicators, serves to increase levels of bureaucracy in the system. In order to test students at the programmed levels: at the end of the fourth year of primary education and the second year of secondary education, the deployment of a considerable number of evaluators is required; in addition, a great number of people are needed — not to mention the accompanying infrastructure — in order to: design and print the tests; to mark the tests speedily; to analyze the resulting data; interpret them; and to edit, publish and disseminate the findings. No doubt a whole new business will emerge around the administration of these tests. Indeed, simply printing such a large number of exams represents a solid business opportunity for the appointed company. To administer and correct the tests will also generate a certain amount of employment, so much that technological solutions to some of the computational and statistical work will likely be sought. Did the Ministry of Education and Science calculate the cost of this new form of bureaucracy together with the cost of contracting the bureaucrats necessary to administer it?

14. Positivism becomes more entrenched as the only valid epistemology in education. We find before us a form of mass diagnostic assessment, based on answering numerous test questions in a limited period of time and where test conditions carry with them a certain degree of tension for students, given that teachers have probably communicated that the school's future is to some extent in play with every answer. Such a scenario involves something akin to Behaviorist models of stimulus- response. Other cognitive approaches are ignored, rendered unacceptable or

invalid, approaches which focus on more qualitative and continuous modes of monitoring and confirming the state of learning. We have not, for example, mentioned Piagetian and Neo-Piagetian clinical methods of unraveling the truth about what children really know and understand, an approach that revolutionized the world of psychology. Currently, other developments in cognitive psychology, such as Howard Gardner's theory on multiple intelligences (Howard Gardner 2003) would also disregard as useless the testing approach to assessment.

The introduction of forms of diagnostic assessment under discussion here, then, goes against the general recommendations not only of pedagogy, but also of psychology, as well as the very educational administrations themselves, who for some time have promoted the need for on-going assessment. What receives official support now, however, is a system of final exams, in which the student effectively gambles nine months' learning in a couple of hours. It is something which in theory no-one defends yet that the most progressive and committed teachers put into practice every day. We all know the sensation of having had 'a bad day'; all of us, that is, except the Administration in its choice of an evaluative system of such a positivist nature.

A political re-reading of the consequences of indicators

The discourse based on school autonomy advanced by neoliberal education administrations in fact conceals authoritarian measures of control and monitoring of schools, such as minimum compulsory learning topics in each discipline and level (which in reality means 'maximum' topics, as any practicing teacher knows from experience), as well as the extensive list of indicators used in external assessment.

The philosophy of procuring a greater involvement of teachers, granting them more autonomy and offering them better training and a more appropriate range of support for keeping their knowledge current, whether scientific or pedagogical, all crumbles in face of a government that opts for a culture of suspicion and, hence, the reinforcement of surveillance measures and authoritarian control over what happens in the classroom; a culture which aims at limiting the range and scope of work topics through standardized testing. The most free and open elements on the curriculum disappear, so that wholly closed and rigid ones can be developed. It is, in addition, an

approach that tries to bury from sight more constructivist models and to substitute these with others of a more behaviorist orientation.

In this way a notable and yet invisible re-centralization of power is produced, which affects as much teachers as students and their families, and this even though the official discourse ostensibly promotes decentralization. In the end, the resulting phenomenon is one of an internalization of that control, which forces teachers to self-regulate in order to achieve exactly what is dictated by the controlling governmental agency, the National Institute of Assessment. Despite having made both teachers and wider society believe that schools and individual teachers enjoy complete freedom, those working in the education sector have their hands tied as never before.

The assessment process itself, which the Ministry claims will help to inform and orientate families, turns into a foreboding mechanism that exerts pressure and control over the work carried out in the classroom. Imagine how, each time international comparative studies on education are made public, a significant avalanche of criticism directed at teachers follows. Very rarely is this criticism aimed at educational Administrations. These bodies turn to such studies whenever they seek to initiate some kind of reform, but with their own ends in mind, in the process manipulating the way the data are interpreted, and never questioning the way in which the findings were arrived at.

It is particularly noteworthy that we are not in the least accustomed to seeing criticisms of these comparative studies themselves: their form, their content, how they were conducted, and which criteria were used to compare the cultural level of students. Neither are we used to reading any analyses aimed at clarifying whether the findings are genuinely significant; few doubts are raised as to whether what is in fact being assessed can be done adequately with the kinds of tests used. This critical void creates the feeling that there is a national and international consensus about the relevance of what should be assessed, the strategies to be employed in the formulation of diagnostic conclusions, and indeed in the choice of illustrative examples from studies. This is not even to mention the atmosphere in which testing is carried out. Thus, for example, Margaret Brown (2001, p. 63) discusses forms of comparing

students from different countries, citing the case of a school in Korea where the necessity of presenting their country in a positive light led students to be highly conscious of the need to make a great effort: 'students taking the tests marched to the sounds of the school band and were pressurized to do all that they could for their country.' On the other hand, in a North American school students were informed that the test scores would not count towards their cumulative grades and, that if they found any item especially difficult, they should move on to the next. Such a case highlights the probability that student motivation will affect the results obtained in testing. It is even probable that, at a given moment, those students most annoyed or upset by teachers might seek vengeance by deliberately performing poorly and thus placing their teachers in an unfavorable light.

We can affirm that, since the decade of the nineties, school policy has been inundated with vocabulary such as effectiveness, quality, performance and excellence. However, these terms are understood in a commercial sense, that is, jettisoning any analysis of the social context and the sociocultural characteristics of the families who send their children to a particular institution. Nowadays differences, as much between schools and teachers as between students, are understood solely in terms of degree of personal effort. Concern for social inequality, for social, political, cultural and economic injustice have been put aside, and as a result, understanding difference is reduced to its very minimum expression: as the result of personal effort.

This de-ideologization clearly pushes any concern for course content, skills and the kind of values that schools should promote outside public debate. It is, indeed, as if these issues were no longer considered problematic, as if they could be resolved by a decision that any specialist might make and upon which there is universal agreement; that is, the conflicts that form part of the production and diffusion of knowledge have been eliminated, as have those naturally competing perspectives and explanations of a given phenomenon which lead to a corresponding number of possible solutions. The ideology of a false consensus accompanies everything.

Teaching is thus reduced to a technical procedure, and its conceptualization as work of an intellectual, moral and political nature disappears. It is assumed that inequalities can be managed within the school walls, and solutions sought therein. In this way,

individualist ideologies that are typical of current neoliberal and conservative societies, make each student uniquely responsible for his or her own success or failure. As a result, prevailing education policy stands exonerated from responsibility.

The notion of indicators cannot be understood in isolation from other decisive questions, such as the treatment of diversity in the classroom and educational justice. Equally, it might be suggested that to the extent that uniform indicators are established across the entire Spanish State, the risk is run that we forget that our current reality is pluri-national, multi-cultural and multi-linguistic, a risk which brings with it the enforcement of greater uniformity, defined from the position of a traditionalist centralism obsessed with the recovery of the ghost of a Great, United Spain.

Any debate on performance indicators and the evaluation of indicators in the education system should involve the kind of moral, ethical and political questions that are intrinsic to educational policy.

In any case, if the State imposes standards for different subjects and at different stages, it would be logical that it should also dictate standards regarding exactly which teaching resources all schools should have access to (library and classroom libraries, audiovisual materials, laboratories, computers, software, maps); the number of teachers deemed necessary and the special subject areas with which they should be associated; as well as other specialists within the school (administrative personnel and IT specialists, for example); and the quality of furniture, sports facilities, heating and cooling systems, interior decoration and design, necessary space and cafeteria, amongst others). In establishing such measures, consideration of the economic, cultural and social conditions of the school location is also necessary, so that additional incentives are provided for those schools receiving students from socially marginal backgrounds or with special needs. Some sort of incentive should be offered in the case of schools located in socially deprived areas, so as to attract the best possible teachers.

The policy of implementing performance standards is one further step towards the re-establishment of social engineering models that exert control over all matters

relating to citizens. These models had been in crisis throughout the seventies and eighties because the social sciences had promoted more hermeneutic and qualitative models, as well as the need to attend to the political and ethical dimensions of knowledge. Even nowadays, numerous studies have shown that the more positivistic concepts and methodologies have a great many points of weakness.

In contrast to the procedural principles laid out by Lawrence Stenhouse (1984), which focus on the processes of learning, the formulation of standards is concerned with the measurement of end products, and not with orientating teaching and learning in the classroom. A democratic education policy ought to propose procedural approaches which serve to stimulate debate over school issues in both teaching institutions and at the heart of society itself; it should directly facilitate making those decisions which best improve the quality of both the resources and processes of teaching and learning.

It is therefore advisable that evaluative policies based on standards be closely monitored, since these can easily lead to processes of indoctrination, with tests that contain certain themes and topics while omitting others, tests which students must answer in specific ways and according to specific interpretations.

With educational policy based on such measures, then, we are witness to a model of State Panopticon or State Assessor, which aims at the maximum management and control of the education system in ways that are coherent with the market policies of neoliberalism. Nonetheless, this dismemberment of the public sphere will come across as perfectly legitimate public action. Obsessed with the product while ignoring processes and contexts, this situation will always favor the private sector because, in private education, sufficient human and economic resources are generally available for whatever is necessary.

Indicators and standards operate as a strategy for securing whatever the prevailing ministerial bureaucracy decides at a given moment. The discourse of professionalism is thus rendered little more than a slogan. Consequently, the role of the teacher becomes comparable to that of an efficient worker, following the orders of others, and doing so in a way which is clearly laid out. Professional autonomy is merely a phrase for use in public relations and as a means of attaining the consent of teachers, creating

in them the belief that they hold genuine decision-making power when in reality their hands are ever more securely tied.

In summary, at the present moment we cannot decontextualize the plan to formulate indicators from the framework in which they derive their legitimacy. Through the LOCE, the Popular Party hoped to bring about an educational counter-reform aimed at restoring power to the most conservative cultural and ideological groups, as well as safeguarding the interests of sectors supportive of neoliberalism.

Now, with the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) in office, the aim ought to be very much the contrary, to contribute to democratizing far more fully the education system and to implementing policies of greater educational and curricular equity and justice.

Notes

* This is a post-compulsory, two-year college-preparation program offered within secondary education (corresponding to ages 16-18).

[1] Spain is a state composed of seventeen "autonomous communities" or regions, each one of which has its own competences in education. Hence, administrations with responsibilities for education in Spain include both the central State (the Ministry of Education) and each region's own department of education.

[2] Article 21: 'General diagnostic assessment. At the end of the second cycle of primary education all schools will undertake a diagnostic assessment of the basic skills acquired by students. This assessment, the responsibility of education administrations, will be of a formative and orientative nature for schools and an informative nature for families and the broader educational community'. It is a test taken by all students at ten years of age, in addition to those who have been required to repeat a year (144.1). Article 29: 'General diagnostic assessment. At the end of the second cycle of secondary education all schools will undertake a diagnostic assessment of the basic skills acquired

by students. This assessment, the responsibility of education administrations, will be of a formative and orientative nature for schools and an informative nature for families and the broader educational community'. It is a test taken by all students at fourteen years of age, in addition to those who have been required to repeat a year.

[3] <http://www.iasb.org>

[4] Not to mention the growing number of databases on web sites frequently visited by students seeking thematically listed academic term papers and answers to exam questions.

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