

A Critique of the Standardization of Geography Education in Germany

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Abstract

The preparation and adoption of national standards among many countries has been a common practice during the past three decades. This paper presents a critical analysis of the Standards for German Geography Education published in 2006, as well as, a broader critique of standardization in education. The discussion is set within the context of the educational reform movement in Germany over the past decade. The analysis presents critiques from both philosophical, as well as, practical perspectives, and cites instances where standardization and its effects on education fail to address meaningful content in geography for students, teachers, and society. The article delves into the important questions that address the meaning of education. While attention is devoted to Germany education, the articles raise thoughtful questions and discussion that can be asked about the process of educational standardization in other countries. (Abstract prepared by the Editor.)

Keywords: Geography education, German geography standards

Introduction

Since the start of the millennium, the public education debate in Germany has been oriented towards standardization and competency. Everywhere, teaching is being transformed in keeping with education standards and

competency models. Critics of this competency and standard program emphasize that the ambiguity of the current reform trends — pretending to be “education” — have nothing in common with the concept of education as the “projection of human self-determination, removed from social control and allowing for a critical stance towards the status quo” [own translation] (Thompson, 2009, p. 7).

This paper is based on a hermeneutic and phenomenological viewpoint. With regard to such questions as how the anthropogenesis origin of mankind can ever be comprehended, these issues have evolved against the background of educational philosophies and critical theories of culture. With this in mind, the human condition is perceived as an inherent quality, as something that, contrary to a purely natural thing, cannot be decomposed in causal relationships. This implies they can never be recorded just quantitatively or analytically, but other meaning must be considered. Meaning refers to embeddedness in the living environment (Danner, 2006, p. 239). I agree with Kokemohr that education is not a linear calculable process that can be standardized, but is an event in which we have contradictory experiences that are not part of our given world and our interactions with it. Learning incorporates extraneous processes, located beyond our thought patterns and figures of speech, beyond our order patterns that affect us and challenge us to change the fundamental images of our world and self-relationship (Kokemohr, 2007, p. 21).

Here, it becomes clear that education occurs during a confrontation with something that eludes us. As soon as we can classify it, the educational process has already been concluded. Something that struck us previously has subsequently been formed. In this sense, education is linked to a schism in the subject. In this schism between the impact and finding a response to an experience, formation occurs. The dynamics, which form the basis of the spatiotemporal shifts in experience, are described in a differentiated form by Bernhard Waldenfels in “Bruchlinien der Erfahrung” (see Waldenfels, 2002).

The consequences of education reform become apparent in a comparison of a phenomenological approach to education and the current debate’s conceptual notion of education. In the following article, I deal with three important points of criticism of the reform as it applies to geography education in Germany, each of which focuses on a specific level of the educational system: 1) renunciation of education (educational and philosophical level), 2) education as adaptation (practical instructional level), and, 3) impairment of the modes of geography (didactics level). To understand the socio-political dynamics in which the conversion of the education system is embedded, I provide insights into the developments that frame the education and political change process before I reveal specific points of critical review. The paper

leads to a conclusion that includes a phenomenological perspective. It should become clear that the competency orientation has alternatives even if it at present seems a *fait accompli*.

Background of the Education Reform in Germany

The current standardization efforts are embedded in a movement that goes back to the 17th century. Since that time, the underlying trend towards expressing qualities and qualitative concepts in metric and quantitative proportions has gradually gained ground in German education. Initially, the philosophic and reflexive content of the Enlightenment's rationalization processes were still interpreted in the sense of Kant's slogan "*sapere aude*" ("dare to be wise"). Thereafter, the Enlightenment's aims were increasingly reinterpreted with the passage of time. The bourgeois subject's liberation movements were of decreasing importance. The Enlightenment's emancipatory aims disappeared from the debate as part of a subject-hostile interpretation of the era under the emerging capitalist industrial society. "The myth of the naked number was added to the myths of religion" [own translation] (Moegling, 2010, p. 5).

Beginning in the 20th century, the German educational system was overwhelmed by the power of the rhetoric of quantification. The categorical predominance of quantitative concepts over qualitative concepts was, amongst others, derived from the successful technical mastery of nature and their support by science and epistemology. In this sense, it is now assumed that everything that can be stated about nature is also measurable and can be expressed quantitatively. Accordingly, qualitative differences are regarded as soft (weak) data and tentative until they are replaced by precise metrical definitions, i.e., hard data (see Ruhloff, 2007, p. 57). Education standards thus follow the psychometric tradition according to Thorndike's: "Whatever exists, exists in some amount" (Thorndike, 1921, p. 379, cited in Herzog, 2007, p. 58).

The educational and political support for the standardization hyperbole in the 21st century can be understood if, on the one hand, one knows that the new process, which was activated by the Bologna Declaration (<http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf>), was not completely unexpected, but that the new educational regime was initiated rather gradually. Various political action programs preceded the "PISA shock" and the "education catastrophe" (see also Pongratz, 2009). On the other hand, the standardization efforts must be viewed in the context of an economical education within a neo-liberal view in which man becomes his own entrepreneur and education is regarded as an investment in human capital (see also Krautz,

2007, 2009; Liessmann, 2006; Münch, 2009). In addition, the education reform can be regarded as a governmental strategy par excellence incorporated within a strategic complex aimed at re-coding social relationships in the new shape of socialization, which Deleuze and Foucault regard as the transition from a disciplinary to a controlling society (see Dzierzbicka, 2006; Klingovsky, 2009; Liesner, 2004; Pongratz, 2004, 2009). Liesner (2006), for example, characterizes the way faculty colleagues are included in the education reform through the construction of internal school curricula, as a dual strategy. Within this dual strategy, teachers “are, on the one hand, systematically deemed to be individuals, but are simultaneously bound to certain security strategies so that their demanded independence does not become uncontrollable” [own translation] (Liesner, 2006, p. 124ff).

These aspects place the educational reform topic in the realm of globalization studies, neo-liberalization, and government control. Owing to their interrelationships, these complex social, economic, and political processes form the background of my current criticism. In this respect, the reform discourse with its inherent technocratic logic is part of the discourses of the neo-liberalization and governmental control actions. Those in turn form the basis of the reform program. In this context, it is clear that many words in the educational discourse have a connotation to technology with police and military vocabulary terminology, such as control, investigation, offensive, and strategy (see Spinner, 2004, p. 6). Plastic words — basic building blocks of the industrial nation — are used, such as development, relationship, progress, paradigm, system, information, as well as, codes (ciphers) spawned by the education reform itself, such as controlling, employability, life-long learning, modularization, monitoring, profiling, quality management, self-commodification, standardization, certification, and excellence (see Pongratz, 2009, p. 46).

Renunciation of Education

A fundamental criticism of the current education reform in Germany is that the nearly total focus on standards orientation and individual competency undermine the humanist educational ideal. How should this be interpreted? Ever since antiquity, education has — in the humanistic, critical, and enlightened sense — been self-education. Man is not educated but educates himself and can only do so through his own initiative. “Man is free and should not be made something or be used by anyone. Man is not educated and raised for the state, the economy or the church, but only for his own sake” [own translation] (Krautz, 2009, p.14). Wilhelm von Humboldt used “world” as a metaphor for

the foreign, which evades acquisition of knowledge issue and is understood to be the topic of the learning process. This understanding underlines the meaning of the relationship between a person's own and the foreign within the educational process, which is oriented towards the ideal of a practical freedom to learn and one's own responsibility (see Dörpinghaus, 2009, p. 39).

The proponents of standardization, however, repeatedly claim the humanistic education concept for themselves. They show that the competency concept includes the education concept, that it does not fundamentally differ from the educational ideal, but rather that the notion of education is only finalized by unified standards (see Ruhloff, 2007, p. 56). In the Klieme expertise "Zur Entwicklung nationaler Bildungsstandards" [Developing National Education Standards — own translation], it is shown that competency is not only compatible with education, but that it promotes an education that has been based on educational theory (see Gruschka, 2011, p. 42f).

The relationship between educational theory, education standards, and competency models is constructed as follows: "Competencies describe nothing more than those skills of the subject that the education concept also meant and assumed: Acquired skills — i.e., not natural skills — experienced through and in specific dimensions of social reality and which are suitable for the design of these dimensions, skills open to life-long cultivation, progress, and refinement, so that they can graduate internally, for example, from the basic to an advanced general education, but also skills that open up this process of self-learning because one aims at skills that are not only acquired through assignments and processes, but are also detachable from their original situation, sustainable, and open to problems" [own translation] (Klieme et al., 2003, p. 65).

Gruschka (2011) unmasks the attempt of the standardization proponents to seize educational theory for empirical educational research without considering education and theoretical matters. Education should not "be determined in an idealistic, but in an empirically valid sense, i.e., in a provable sense, by means of the pedagogical objective of education" [own translation] (Gruschka, 2011, p. 28). This is done as if there is no distinction between the various theoretical and empirical models of the diverging disciplines of philosophy; pedagogics, linguistics, and psychology (see Gruschka, 2011, p. 44). I offer five critical comments on the monopolization of the education concept by describing how the standardization concept is opposed to the traditional conception of education.

1. A valuable understanding of heterogeneity means supporting pupils in their various performance profiles, to acknowledge diversity in

a learning group. According to Marquard, it is not important that everybody in the education process ends up the same, but that everybody ends up differently from the way they started (Marquard cited in Dörpinghaus, 2009, p. 39). Standards attempt to have people end up being nearly the same in their education attainment.

2. In the new educational discourse, the heterogeneity of the student body is a central theme because of the plural social attributes of the 21st century world; the challenge to individualize the learning process is an answer to this newly plural social phenomenon. Is it necessary for all pupils to attain the same standards within the plural social context?
3. The individual nature of the person's learning functions in a way so they always learn in a specific situation and refer individually to this situation. In this sense, every learning movement, like each learning result, is inherent to an individual. Learning is also incorporated in a communicative, interactive event "that conveys insights and changed ability as if from nowhere" [own translation] (Ruhloff, 2007, p. 53). The syntheses, of a habitual and intellectual nature, originating from a changed form are always unique. The concept of a quasi natural-law-like interaction of all learning actions can be ruled out on pedagogical grounds. However, the "pedagogical screening procedures by means of competency models amounts to a correspondingly quasi-law-like standardization of the pedagogical reality" [own translation] (Ruhloff, 2007, p. 55). Standardizations cannot be adequately designed to subsume individual learning performance.
4. The education standards debate in Germany does not consider implicit knowledge, which is fundamental for pupils' understanding of the self and the world. Implicit knowledge means that "each of our thoughts includes components that we only register indirectly, incidentally, and below our actual mental content — and that all thinking emerges from this component, which is, in a sense, part of our body" [own translation] (Polanyi, 1985, p. 10). The competency ladder that pupils have to climb step by step is contained in the notion that education occurs according to a predictable and foreseeable relationship, and can be cumulatively ordered. However, there is no theory of skills development. "If you do not want to define a model from the outside [...] you have to reconstruct it from the inside out, and that brings us back to the formation of the subject and its obstinacy" [own translation] (Gruschka, 2006, p. 14). If you think of edu-

cation as occurring from the inside out, then it occurs in leaps rather than linearly. The meaning of reflection and experiential processes frequently only becomes recognizable afterwards; they cannot be quantified and obtain relevance at a predetermined point in time. Consequently, teaching is therefore always unpredictable retroactively (see Pazzini, 2008). Standardization is designed on a reverse basis, predicting that a learning outcome will result from a particular learner interaction with content and context.

5. In the education debate, essential moments, such as experience, perception, intuition, imagination, emotional responsiveness, creativity, situations of amazement and abandonment, fall by the wayside. Instead, a new image of the pupil has been established: "He is the person who plans, who controls his behavior, who directs himself using metacognition, is conscious of his objectives and possesses applicable strategies" [own translation] (Spinner, 2004, p. 6). Terms such as "self-directing," "self-regulation," and "self-organization" replace proven terms such as "self-reflection" and "self-determination," and support the standardization logic linguistically.

Education as Adaptation

Educational standard implies a norm that is measurable. As an institution, the school has always known such norms. Grading systems and learning goal orientation have always had a standardizing effect (see Herzog, 2007; Maag Merki, 2007). The education standards, however, put new emphasis on normalization. Contrary to the description of institutionalized pedagogical tasks by means of "guidelines" or "targets" to be met, the education standards require a new commitment because they must be met by virtue of educational policy mandates. The conceptually decisive and categorically new factor in the debate is to avoid any possibility "that the standard will not be achieved" [own translation] (Ruhloff, 2007, p. 55). Hence the education standards cannot be assessed as merely specifying what has always been done (Ruhloff, 2007, p. 54f). Rather, the standardization and competence orientation constitutes a prescriptive, absolute, and closed system. Despite the categorical change from normalization, the impression is given that nothing will change on an instructional level. This implies a double procedure: providing individual education; while seeking to simultaneously ensure greater clarity and transparency in respect of measurable student performance through standardized tests.

In the following three points, I constructively discuss first the strategies with which the double procedures can be made feasible. It will be clear that teachers are thus placed in a paradoxical situation in which professional action is impossible. Second, I explain that the calculations of the structural reform will fully impact the instructional level and will put a process of change in motion that will occur before the teachers are able to intervene. Under the stipulations of the standardization of the school system, instruction — which is independent of individual teaching — acts as a revaluation practice, which will have serious consequences for the pupils. Third, I provide a description of what works in the hermeneutical sense of teaching.

1. On one hand — based on school performance tests such as the PISA (<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pisa/>), IGLU (http://iea-dpc.de/iglu_2001_200601.html?&L=1), and DESI (<http://www.dipf.de/en/projects/assessment-of-student-achievements-in-german-and-english-as-a-foreign-language>) — the media always aim to determine whether pupils have done better or worse compared to the ranking of the competing OECD countries. The idea that the measurement of pupil performance and the control of the system per output will lead to a change in instruction and individual performance has been repeatedly propagated. On the other hand, the education standards were originally intended as guidelines to monitor the school system and not for controlling instruction or individual training. Klieme et al. (2003) explicitly advise against the deployment of the standards for grading, certification, selection and prognosis purposes, because the measurement error is too large in individual performance tests and diagnosis based on the standards (see Klieme et al., 2003).

On the one hand, the conference of the Ministry of Education and the Arts in Germany determined that the teachers may spend at least a third of their time on activities other than applying the education standards (see Vollmer, 2007). On the other hand, no details were provided regarding what the “other activities” comprised and what the relationship between the standards and the “other activities” should be. On a didactics level, teachers are therefore encouraged to participate in education and continuing education “in which the necessary competences to plan and implement standards-based, motivating instruction are conveyed” [own translation] (see Hemmer, 2011; Reinfried, 2007, p. 83). However, as the word “standards-based” instead of “standardized” indicates, as in the

past, teachers are tasked with identifying and expressing what they believe is “very important as a geographical educational goal, but not verifiable as standard (so-called competences which are difficult to access)” [own translation] (Vollmer, 2007, p. 85). As to date, teachers should initiate understanding and perception processes and mention something about their progress, thus nurturing those partial competences that cannot be directly or easily acquired from the outside (Vollmer, 2007).

This duplicity in the current reform debate has placed teachers in a paradoxical situation. The conflicting demands can obviously not be fulfilled on a practical teaching level. Teachers can only rely on themselves to bridge this gap. But whatever they decide, professional attitude and actions cannot prevail under these circumstances. And while the failure of education and the school is inherent to the system, educators are often blamed and characterized as incompetent, inadequate, conservative, and hostile to innovation. These are attributes that should possibly be ascribed to the education reform itself. Subject-related further education in preparation for standards assessments exacerbates the teachers’ dilemma, as they usually do not provide an opportunity to address the role of the teacher under these paradoxical conditions. On the contrary, most subject-related further education presents a paradoxical demand in which prescribed educational reform is reinforced.

2. If you examine teaching practice, it quickly becomes apparent that the cognitive performance measurements, as well as, the educational standardization discourse feed into the educational reform context. Teachers are still responsible for the structuring of their courses and are given the necessary pedagogical freedom and discretionary powers to monitor individual teaching processes. Nevertheless, they teach in a changed school context and — in so far the school is perceived as a polity — in a changed political system characterized by a changed culture, changed forms of relationship, and changed roles. The systemic changes aimed at education monitoring are perpetuated at all levels of the educational system. The standardization efforts have therefore led to a fundamental change in the notion of education, teaching, learning, pupils’ and teachers’ roles, and the relevance of content. Consequently, the conditions of education have changed massively and fundamentally (for the consequences of system changes for the system level see, Lindemann, 2010).

In these dynamics, even without being explicitly requested by the system, teachers are always compelled to comply with the institution's standardization efforts. They must position their teaching — resulting from their experience with their daily actions and, which can only rarely be verbalized or presented in a different way than in terms of educational performance — in a normalized, pre-structured matrix. According to the German didactics expert, Spinner (2004), it is possible to actually observe at schools that “new didactic thinking and behavior structures develop which teachers experience as a massive change in their tuition behavior and in their attitude toward pupils' learning process” [own translation].

In view of their generally accepted relevance, pupils perceive performance measurements as supposedly neutral or objective forms of performance feedback, and as an opportunity to compare their performance with that of their peers in the classrooms in Germany, Austria, and the world. If the pupils regard that which is tested and rewarded as relevant, these pupils will become a part and parcel of these changed dynamics. Thus, this prevents students from later refusing to accept the standardizing view and being able to withdraw from the change processes. Instead, they increasingly perceive the teachers' actions and their own learning success in terms of relevant output factors.

Accordingly, in a performance sense, the everyday pedagogical situation leads to a blatant change in the educational situation. In this respect, school performance measurements and output orientation have a critical, but no less influential effect on education and on the teaching and learning of subjects. In this manner, what was once regarded as critical education in a hermeneutical sense, is now shifted towards adaptation performance. In this self-referential sense, it can be said that pupils receiving standardized education — measured by standards and competences — become better, to a certain extent more adapted to the required expectations. “The unfolding of individuality and taking subjectivity seriously are — partly against your will or that you are aware of it — repressed by standardization processes” [own translation] (Spinner, 2004, p. 5). In this way, it also creates an education reform that suits pupils (see Kraus, 2009). Critics of the reform rightly describe this deplorable state of affairs as a sell-out of education. Teachers have from the outset complained greatly about the effects of the reform on day-to-day education, but

to date those concerns have not been taken into consideration, or intentionally ignored, from an educational and public policy perspective.

In accordance with the notion that education is a cumulative, capital-based, to be acquired project, teaching is regarded as the manufacturing process of this product and considered to be calculable. In the service of the learning process's output orientation, the teacher is thus often assigned the role of moderator or learning consultant. They have to support pupils in achieving the designated competences and standards. As the output is now prescribed, and because of the greatest possible transparency of the envisaged outputs in comparison to their current performance, pupils can work on their learning progress and rely on teachers only when they need support in planning and/or taking the next step. Pupils and teachers are thus only present in their social roles as pupils and teachers, and not as subjective individuals.

Within the framework of the education reform, the teaching-learning process is mostly regarded as a technology, as if one could predict which methods could stimulate the learning process. It is often said that teaching is still too teacher-centered, too directive and too instructive, implying that wrong methods and contents have been used. The time has come to recognize that everything "[is] scholastically [...] embedded in an interactive and dialogical relationship" [own translation] (Bauer, 2007, p. 14) and then understand the structure that unfolds in this relationship. I define it as a de-subjection of the school and education. A similar process continues in the reform program of the universities that is "*due to a fixation with transparency [...] everything invisible, unplannable, even unconscious under suspicion of being not exact, not clear or distinct, potentially delusional. However, first and foremost, the thinking, feeling and imaginary of others are invisible...*" [own translation] (Pazzini, 2005, p. 138). That which is invisible or not measurable does not simply disappear if you ignore it; it remains subject to the educational processes and also contributes in a non-thematic manner to the successes and/or failures of the students.

3. But the question remains: What actually works in teaching? Training and education are always tied to pupils' individuality, to the specific singularity of the teacher, as well as, to the specific situation in which training and teaching take place. "An education" or

“an upbringing” do not exist as such. It is only the education and upbringing of a single person and the educator’s tangible responsibility that exists. In terms of a hermeneutic and social sciences pedagogy, it is inappropriate to speak of a quantification of educational success or the educator’s universal responsibility (see Danner, 2006). Nevertheless, no empirical evidence exists that teaching educates. One reason for this is that effects often emerge much later, sometimes years later. Learning processes are only represented in the past (Dörpinghaus, 2009). In addition, each attempt at identifying the direct effects of a teacher on student learning are subject to unforeseen answers (see Wimmer, 2010).

Impairment of the Modes of Geography

We will now examine the modes of geography, on which the German geographical education standards are based. The contribution of the subject of geography to education is set out on page one of the National Education Standards. “The subject geography’s specific contribution to world development comprises the explanation of the interrelations between nature and society in various space types and sizes. On the one hand, the school subject focuses on space as a category, but, on the other hand, it combines nature and social research knowledge and forms a multidisciplinary bridge between the fields of science and education” [own translation] (DGfG, 2010, p. 5). The formulation is based on a geographical conception, which is, on the one hand, characterized by the assumption that geography as a subject has a dual character, i.e., that of social and natural science. On the other hand, the formulation is based on the classical space paradigm of spatial structure research. Both these foci on professional understanding are reflected in some geographical research areas; however, there are also other significant geographical research fields that have turned away from the idea of a dual character, as well as, from the spatial structure research (see, for example, Weichhart, 2008).

These more recent but varied professional approaches, which were developed in the course of “cultural turns,” are based on specific acquisition and experiential notions of spatiality; these notions are only addressed marginally and arbitrarily in the education standards (see, for example, p. 15 and p. 16 cited in DGfG, 2010, p. 18). An essentialist mode of thought dominates most of the German geography standards. In addition, space is viewed, analyzed, discussed, and evaluated as an objective variable. Consequently, the idea is

conveyed that there is a single, acceptable world view — legitimized by the geography discipline, and which should either be identified or rediscovered by students within the context of spatiality.

A mono-perspective and one-dimensional world view are contrary to the educational objectives of emancipation and democratization, as well as, to the notion of a critical science. In a widest sense of constructivist logic, it is far more important to question the established world views, to recognize the plurality of world views and social realities, and to develop processes for critically examining hegemonic social realities (see Dickel & Glasze, 2009). In this spatial logic, people are mostly taken seriously as subjects who, before each reflection, are already intertwined in social spaces and processes. Their environment permanently affects them and, simultaneously, they affect their environment and both man and the environment change in the course of the reciprocal interaction. The process of the forming and transforming of the self and the world is regarded as making space or spatial production.

Spatial formation is not designed according to an absolutely valid and permanent scientific or specialist system. Rather, the forming of the self and the world occurs by changing one's own, personal relationships and those of the world. Geographic studies provide a way to comprehend the interwoven dynamics of the self and the world in an increasingly differentiated way and to increase the personal scope for action, reflection, and experience. It is this differentiation process that enables a person to become intellectually free and gain self-confidence. In this emancipatory sense, freedom is not located outside society, but within a permanently changing and variable social order that is attached to individuals. It becomes clear that essentialist and constructivist / phenomenological perceptions of space follow various scientific paradigms that assign a fundamentally distinct meaning to people so that these perceptions exclude them scientifically and in a research and logical manner.

The limitation and contraction of the education standards to the essentialist logic of spatiality is neither clearly stated nor justified for the reader. The intransparency of the standard's implicit logic, as well as, the lack of classification of this logic in the spectrum of geographic and spatial perceptions, prevents the standards' from adopting a critical and contemplated perspective. The education standards' German readership knows a great deal about the professional development of geography, as well as, the implicit premises of the scientific paradigms. Since the geography education standards have been legitimized by the Fachverband Geographie [own translation: Geographical Association], the professional validity is not in doubt; rather, the illusion is created that the bandwidth of the subject geography is also reflected in

the standards. This has led to the public, policy makers, teachers, and pupils harboring the misconception that the content and themes of the school subject geography have hardly changed since the 1980s.

As characterized by the education standards, the subject's image coincides mostly with the image of geography that the education and public policy makers obtained as a subject during their schooldays and studies. Furthermore, this image is also medially manifested and disseminated in various topical science programs in the media. The result is that everybody now knows what geography is about as a subject. The repeated media broadcasts of supposed geographical knowledge and official documentation, such as the education standards, reproduce an old-fashioned and obsolete understanding of the subject. They contribute to the dissemination of a conservative expectation of what is meant by geography. This makes it difficult, or even impossible, to discuss learning perspectives in geography instruction, to modernize geography in line with current social, scientific, as well as, subject and theoretical time-stamps, and to maintain the connection to related fields of study, or even to newly acquire them. In the context of the globalized society, however, a regressive education and political concept of geography as a subject cannot be justified.

If one views geography instruction from a learning-oriented logic, this changes what is understood by geographical subject matter. In the German geography education standards, it is stipulated that the subject matter is something that can be agreed upon by subject experts, geography didacticians, and teachers. The description of system components, basic concepts, as well as, the scale levels the observation should include as many research perspectives, issues, and as many observation positions as possible for the subject matter represented. Consequently, the lowest common denominator of professional understanding has been put forward by the German geography education standards. That denominator has since been considered the (essential) core of the geographical subject matter as a (school) subject.

The science of geography does not exist in itself, however, but only in aspects of the approach, of access to the content, and in the form of the scientific method. The content basis for geography is mainly generated during the research process. The core of geography is a product of the modes of research processes and from the practical implementation of geographic queries and research. Nonetheless, the enshrined limited concept of the geographical subject matter in the German education standards contains the notion of an intrinsic wide distribution. In this sense, the education standards do a disservice and discredit geography didactics. What is the essence of geography if it

is not formulated in terms of what geographers think it is? Is it possible to find the essence of geography given the various approaches to the geographical subject matter?

Both scientific and educational approaches require mental performance. In various aspects, the mental seems to be the phenomenon, depending on the approach, while several other aspects (for the time being) remain obscured. The more ways there are to access a subject in terms of its content, the closer it approaches its core principles without ever being able to unlock them. In this process, the essence of the subject matter is not causally and linearly derivable and/or ascertainable by a rational logic, but always (only) available in isolated occurrences as evidential experience. In a phenomenological sense, the essence of geography subject matter can only be experienced, comprehended, and described in conjunction with learning practices, i.e., in the practical implementation of research — and not as a general structure.

Geographical subject matter — the core of the curricular matter as it were — should always be conveyed in willful and self-logical student learning forms and not as an end in itself. If the essence of geographical subject matters' contribution to the development of the world is to be explored by students, then it would be essential to select a form that can accommodate and convey the diverse ways of learning and the various approaches to the subject; a form which clarifies that it is about the learners' references to the subject, which are found through their questions, their research, and through the creation of meaning. It is through this interactive process between the subject and object where people raise questions (see Zahnen, 2005). It is a necessary process for professional clarification to merge with the geographical subject matter and personal education.

Conclusion

If one views education reform from a hermeneutic and phenomenological position, it becomes clear that the current standardization reform usurps the term education under false pretenses, because the competence and standards program promotes a normalization on various systemic levels which have nothing to do with education in an educational philosophic, informative, and humanistic sense. According to the reform package guidelines, people are not educated for their own sake in an open, eventful, time-consuming, and perilous experience process. In this process, learning is encouraging the individual to consistently transcend his/her spatial and temporal location, his/

her prior certainty of the merging of content, of subject matter, of the teacher and of other group members. In this process the teacher does not have access to the learning process, nor can the pupil access it intentionally because it is driven by subtleties that elude the individual. Targeted learner outcomes are thus impossible. Education occurs as a compaction and spatiotemporal shift in the gap between activity and passivity (see Pazzini, 2010). A precondition for self-education is the willingness to consistently introduce schisms to one's own being. Because man generates his own basic principles, the schism is his own personal development basis. Hence, subjectivity does not occur as a singular act. To the contrary, it is consistently renewed in a constant process of discord and continuously overcoming this on various levels (Schäfer, 1992). This type of approach to educational activities has nothing in common with standardization. In this sense education is "what is familiar to everybody but is not available to anyone" [own translation] (Meyer-Drawe, 1998, p. 126), thus precisely that which cannot be provided by standards.

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