

**AMELIA MOLINA GARCÍA****EQUITY AND COMPETITIVENESS: CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN THE IDENTIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL SKILLS AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS****Abstract**

As a starting point, this paper raises various questions to explain the teaching conditions that exist in rural communities and the learning conditions faced by children assigned to the rural community education mode. Equity and competitiveness are the conceptual axis used in the descriptive construction a documentary analysis and my personal experience in Rural Communitarian Educational programs are the methodological strategies used to present this work.

**Introduction**

The complexity of the geographical, ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic diversity that characterizes Mexico, as a Latin American country, reflects a variety of requirements to which the various governmental offices and other type of organizations have to respond. The Mexican Educational System also reflects this organizational complexity because the needs and living conditions of the population require a diversified attention.

In addition to the educational levels: Basic, High School University and Postgraduate studies, there are different types of educational programs that seek to respond to educational needs of the population, i.e. indigenous, adult, “*Telesecundaria*”, distance education, rural education, migrant and community education. In the case of the basic education<sup>1</sup> (preschool, primary and secondary studies), we can identify rural community models characterized by multigrade and multilevel. Such programs are offered in 31 states of the 32 that form Mexico (CONAFE, 2008).

During the last three decades, educational reforms have tried, among other things, to guarantee equity for everyone, thus giving equal opportunities of access, permanence and conclusion of studies; by compensating those differences affecting the most vulnerable population. Those reforms also show an interest in competitiveness emphasizing the development of competences, so that students may acquire them to face modern life situations (Elizondo *et al.*, 2006; Bracho & Hernández, 2012).

Some of the questions that served as axis for this essay are the following: should Education directed to vulnerable people be different than that of privileged urban population? Should this type of second class education be directed to students who are considered belonging to a second class population? (Torres & Tenti, 2000).

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<sup>1</sup> The organization of time and age is distributed as follows: preschool – lasting three years and children’s ages ranging from 3-5 years; elementary school – lasting six years for children from six to eleven years and eleven months, and secondary school – lasting three years for children from twelve to fourteen years and eleven months.

Which are the conditions where educational processes are being held with this type of population? Does Rural Communitarian Education offer any strategies to make possible the development of competences that will go beyond that rural context?

### **Purpose and Methodology Basis**

These questions serve to identify those teaching and learning conditions of children that belong to the Rural Communitarian Educational model. As a methodological strategy, I made a documentary analysis and also based myself in my own thirteen years' experience in Mexico's rural communitarian schools. I also visited some schools which work under the New School Colombian Model ("*Escuela Nueva de Colombia*") in that South American country which uses the same educational principles.

### **Analytical Considerations**

The analytical categories are: equality with equity, pertinence and competitiveness. Equality with equity is identified as the various possibilities that guarantee the entrance to Education, that is, the educational offer, and the differentiated models. Pertinence is defined as the identification of programs that correspond to the socio-cultural and economic conditions of the people to which they are directed, and that satisfy the need and problems of the population. Competitiveness refers to the definition of contents and teaching strategies that focus in the learning situations and the acquisition of competences (knowledge, values, attitudes and abilities). Competitiveness also demands that the population has the necessary and sufficient knowledge to have access to other educational levels, both in its own context as well as in other national and international levels.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

#### ***Rural Educational Context***

Once again, at the beginning of the administrative presidential period (2012-2018) a new reform to the basic education becomes the center of attention of public politics in which the quality and the production of knowledge are the pillars that support production and the sustainable development of the most vulnerable zones of the country. Its enforcement and success depends mainly on the teachers because it requires an appropriation of the educational approach that should be congruent and pertinent, in order to offer the same learning results and improve the ability and knowledge of students (Gajardo & Jiménez, 2009).

We can mention in the case of the Rural Communitarian Education, that although it is not considered explicitly in the Educational Reform, it contains a firm educational model designed in the nineteen seventies and that has been improved with different research works.

In order to consider the articulation of these programs to the public politics, we must not forget that those programs are centered in the search for equity in those zones of low educational development. These programs must present pedagogic innovations and changes in the educational exertion in order to give a solution to the educational residue that formal education leaves in forgotten zones in our country

(De la Torre, 2012). In this sense, starting at the intermediate level, one of the strategies that overcome the educational deficiencies and develop emergent themes is the Summer Community Tutors Program. The tutors are youngsters who study at High School or university levels and do activities for the educational transformation, among them, the regularization of students (De la Torre, 2012).

I shall briefly make reference to the international organizations that play an important role in the development of these programs because they define Mexican educational politics, and other educational politics in Latin America, taking into consideration the research work and the recommendations directed to the search of equality and educational homogenization. For example, the World Bank's interest for social topics is based on the fact that money invested on poor people is not only due to humanitarian purposes but that it is a very profitable business. Thus, the World Bank has become the principal financial source for developing countries (Maldonado, 2000). For that reason, it is important to bear in mind that this banking organization is one of the main producers of documents and a source that generates educational public politics and compensatory programs that overthrow the action of different sectors, especially the educational one.

### ***Equity Conditions in Rural Communitarian Education***

To think of equity as the axis of the scale in the educational offer implies to have as a starting point a diversified option in which the contextual and economic conditions make a difference to offer education for the most vulnerable persons, "so that social and economical minimal inequality is just when it benefits those in disadvantage in the social structure and are found in the free and indiscriminate competition of the social positions (Rawls, 2000). In this sense, an educational compensatory program focused as is the case of the Rural Communitarian Education is justified when it identifies those groups, schools or individuals that are kept away from the rest" (Bracho & Hernandez, 2011).

The above allows me to state that the educational model for small rural populations continues to be the educational program that uses as a basis the economic, social and cultural differences for educational purposes (CONAFE, 2012). This model is organized using a multilevel curricular structure, wherein is possible to work similar themes but for different educational levels; with students of different ages and different learning levels. The questioning of the youngest or of those in disadvantage allows students with higher levels of knowledge to practice their competences when monitoring the activities of their fellow students in order to enhance their learning competences<sup>2</sup>. Equity can also be considered in the "uneven organization of activities", that is, under the school conditions climate that is the scenario for student activities: children may stand up when they require it, use any material they need for their activities and exchange opinions during class, because discipline enforcement is not considered as having to be silent. The teacher is only guides the children's activities and helps them, when necessary.

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<sup>2</sup> The educational basis of this model corresponds to Vigotsky's Socio-cultural theory that is equivalent to the constructivist model of competences used in national and international educational systems.

### **Competitiveness and competences in Rural Communitarian Education**

Educational systems, in general, have established a series of mechanisms where individuality and students' characteristics give way to the imperative need to comply the established standards by the international organizations (Simone & Hersh, 2004). Thus, the educational achievement indicator's identification is present when designing programs and also in the curricula of the various educational levels which are verifiable by applying standardized examinations as: PISA, ENLACE or ESCALE and simultaneously they cause tension between the educational achievement and the development of competences for life, because the latter must generate a reflexive critical attitude in students. In this sense, competences are pedagogical devices that offer the conditions for children and youngsters find some sense in their scholastic learning and build their knowledge according to their needs as persons and social individuals. That is:

When adopting a pedagogy for the construction of knowledge and the acquisition of competences, the school hopes to reduce the volume of "dead knowledge" favoring "living knowledge", that knowledge is so well integrated [in the individual] that is used and enrich during the whole life. [...] to acquire a competence is, simply, to learn to what one ignores, by doing it (Denyer *et al.*, 2002: 31).

Thus, to confirm the dominion of a competence, a person must have the capacity and the elements to face a new and complex situation in which several types of knowledge are present "by doing, and doing it knowledgeably". That includes moral values and ideological positions, attitudinal conditions, historical basis, communicative strategies, procedural abilities and posses some notions to identify and search for answers, among others.

In relation to the Rural Communitarian Education, we can state that the theoretical and methodological conceptions in their programs and their performance in the school space show that the process of knowledge acquisition takes place in that context (CONAFE, 2007). The articulation between the attitudinal and cognitive contents allows students identify those procedural and factual contents. Nevertheless, when they are evaluated from an "educational achievement" perspective, the efficiency index shown by these programs are usually below the national average. For example when considering the global results in the mathematical examination of ENLACE<sup>3</sup> 2012 (SEP, 2012) we observe that in elementary schools, both in communitarian and indigenous education, most students (78.2% and 71% respectively), reach the lowest levels (sufficient and elementary) in the educational achievement, while in regular public elementary schools, this result is slightly below (53.6%) and it is still lower in private schools (34.5%) where better educational conditions prevail.

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<sup>3</sup> This evaluation is applied in all elementary and secondary schools in Mexico with the purpose of evaluating, every year, the students' knowledge acquisition both in Spanish and Mathematics. The other different subjects are applied by turns every year: Natural Science (2012), Geography (2011) and Civic and ethical education (2010). All questions are based in the present academic programs. For this example, the information corresponds to Hidalgo State in Mexico (SEP, 2012).

It is still more worrisome the result in the Spanish area (competence in written language) because the “insufficient” and “elementary” levels rise: in communitarian education (83.9%), in the indigenous one (77%), in the regular public schools (58.1%) and in private schools (30.4%), keeping the same previous relationship that the former.

By looking at these results, it is possible to state that it certain that a second class education is being to the most vulnerable population in our country. Nevertheless, other questions are simultaneously raised, that must be deeply analyzed<sup>4</sup>. Do standardized examinations evaluate the dominance or achievement of competences for life? Are standardized examinations a referent to raise the quality of education?

In the performance of the Rural Communitarian Education program it is possible to identify some other aspects that are not considered in the standardized evaluation such as: the importance of communitarian participation in the educational teaching process and the strong collaboration of the teaching instructors regarding the needs of the community, which are a reflection of the acquisition of competences for life, because inhabitants of that community, children included, solve communitarian problems when they appear. This shows a collaborative task which is not measured in the standardized evaluations, but that involve the “knowledge to do” and “the doing with knowledge”.

### **Some Conclusions**

Considering the equity axis, it was possible to identify that, in searching to equalize opportunities to obtain the education access; some special differentiated programs have been elaborated according to the social, economic and cultural conditions of vulnerable groups.

When conditions demand an uneven approach to improve access to education, contents and educational handling must be different, that is, the teaching instructor must act according to the cognitive requirements of vulnerable groups.

The majority of communitarian educational groups use their natural context in order to have learning scenarios that promote communitarian participation, which is an essential element for the acquisition of competences.

The standardized evaluations must contain some indicators or strategies by which it is possible to measure the acquisition of competences.

Educational politics must bear in mind the experiences which arise in the Rural Communitarian Education in order to improve the acquisition of competences for life and to extend those experiences throughout the country.

Educational politics more inclusive and sustainable must be designed in order to change palliative answers given by international organizations to the arising problems of vulnerable groups.

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<sup>4</sup> Other studies have been made of PISA evaluation. For example, see Díaz-Barriga, 2006.

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