Does Contextualization challenge Critical approaches of curriculum?

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This presentation intends to discuss to what extent contextualization efforts in educational areas could be challenging critical approaches to curriculum.
Curricular contextualization is not a univocal concept as it allows for different interpretations and because it comes from different theoretical origins. It matters to enlight some of them, such as:

- Knowledge production (Novotny et al, 2001)
- Ball’s curriculum policy continuous cycle (1992, 1994)
- Critical discourses about school settle on a single cultural model (Forquin, 1993)
- Bernstein’s approach about re-contextualization - “When theoretical concepts or categories and methods from one discipline are incorporated within another, this should be seen as a process of ‘recontextualization’” (Bernstein 1990)
Broadly, curricular contextualization could be defined as a referential process to a specific social reality.
Critical approaches of curriculum conteste the universality of “traditional theories of curriculum as their view is grounded in the belief that reality can be known and transmitted to students by thoughtfully planning their learning experiences before they enter the classroom”

(Behar-Horenstein, 2000:11).
Critical theories regarding the purpose of curriculum are to design educational practices that could be socially transformative as they promote meaningful learning.

As such, critical theories discuss subjects like curriculum justice; curriculum integration; teachers’ roles as intellectuals; scepticism about neutral scholarship.
Argument

- Contextualization effort makes part of the enlightening purpose and is a way to pursues the unaccomplished promise of Modernity – to develop Mankind, making all men and women able to think and act by themselves (Kant, 1988).
Questions to address

- To what extent can contextualization effort be understood and practiced in a traditional or in a critical curriculum perspective?
- Is there a relationship between knowledge contextualization practices at school and social justice curriculum policies?
- Is knowledge contextualization related to democratic awareness?
How can contextualization effort be understood and practiced in a traditional or in a critical curriculum perspective?
Contextualization is frequently understood as a way of installed power reliability as it seeks a higher insertion into the productive world (Lopes, 2002).

This is to say:

- a utilitarian understanding of the concept.
- that could be used for a social inequality stratification purpose.
However, if contextualization is used to analyse the decision making related to curriculum policies, or to frame teachers’ involvement in curriculum design policies, it could be argued that contextualization matters!
Research we have been conducted concerning both decision making in curriculum policies (Leite; Fernandes & Mouraz, 2011) and teachers’ involvement in curriculum design policies (Mouraz, Leite & Fernandes, 2011), aloud us to discuss these questions from a empirical point of view.
Research showed that:

1 – Portuguese *Curricular contextualization*, seen as a process that enables attention to students’ distinct abilities is not an explicit reference in the Portuguese Inspectorate (GIE) which is in charge of evaluating schools (Leite; Fernandes & Mouraz, 2011). However the next framework to evaluate schools, designed by the GIE, includes contextualization references.

2 - Portugal has been adopting legal discourse that recognizes that the organization and the development of the curriculum must take into account the local characteristics. However, on the basis of teachers’ assumptions of their role as real curriculum designers is still far from being achieved as teachers do not see themselves as true curricular decision-makers (Mouraz, Leite & Fernandes, 2011)
Is there a relationship between knowledge contextualization practices at school and social justice curriculum policies?
Research we have conducted showed that:

1 - contextualized practice can be a valid pathway for the construction of egalitarian educational processes and able to promote opportunities of success to all students.

2 - teachers get involved in processes of construction of social justice as they create learning environments that are meaningful for the students (Ault, 2008), even when they do it more individually than collectively.

It could be argued that contextualization matters!
○ Is knowledge contextualization related to democratic awareness?

○ ...

We have not yet collected enough data to answer that question.
Conclusion

- So far, contextualization efforts could be understood and **put into practice in a critical curriculum approach as it is:**
  - a decentralised curriculum policy
  - and
  - a curriculum justice instrument.
References

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- Is knowledge contextualization related to democratic awareness?

This is a research question we still have to answer in the

Research Project

Putting knowledge in context towards the improvement of students´ achievement

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Thanks.