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HIGHER EDUCATION AFTER BOLOGNA

Challenges and Perspectives

IMPRESA DA UNIVERSIDADE DE COIMBRA

COIMBRA UNIVERSITY PRESS

CHAPTER 3

THE CONCEPT OF QUALITY WITHIN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (EHEA). Dimensions and discourses

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According to national concerns, since the signing of the Bologna Declaration, the search for quality guarantee has been one focus of attention of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This concern, shared by different stakeholders

involved in higher education improvement, has been reinforced by several communiqués on the advances made in these processes, as well as the challenges still to be faced. In this sense, from the conceptualization of what quality implies and taking into account the important role of discourse in the implementation of ways to view reality, and consequently, in social transformation processes, this chapter offers an analysis of these different dimensions of quality underlying EHEA discourses. This analysis has enabled us to notice that within the framework of the two main tendencies of quality, discourses promote an excision between quality and equity, and that the latter, though present in the different communiqués resulting from ministerial meetings, is still listed within the framework of social responsibility and that little progress towards it can be verified. This calls for a revision of this conception based on understanding education not as a product but as a right.

Introduction

Even though several publications have been made concerning the Bologna process, most of them aim at reporting back on advancements of the process rather than offering scenarios for the discussion of the conceptions which support the proposed reforms and their implications on higher education. As claimed by Oliveira and Wilewiki (2010), most available works on Bologna are accounts of the process, rather than debates centred around the concepts, ideas and rationalities which uphold it.

In this sense, and bearing in mind that this transnational endeavour is based on the search for quality, we deem it important to create a space to reflect on the definition of

this concept and the dimensions revealed by discourse in the construction of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). For this purpose, this chapter begins by highlighting the deep concern for quality shared by actors, institutions and in general, current society, as a demand to national educational systems

Having sketched this overview of the search and longing for quality in higher education, we shall move on to a thorny and unclear ground, that of the definition of quality. Here, as well as in many other aspects related to education, different opinions, perceptions and tendencies which shape a varied scenario determined by multiple interests and ways of understanding arise. Hence, in this section we will approach different conceptions and, specially, different factors or dimensions associated to this construct.

This framing allows us to establish the conceptions of quality underlying the discourses that have arisen at different ministerial meetings in which a follow-up of the progress achieved in the development of the Bologna plan is conducted, as well as in other discursive constructions that emerge from this space of harmonization and are shaped by the aims pursued by the agents of this transformation in education.

As colophon, we offer a few closing remarks which give rise to a reflection on everything which had been discussed. Apart from reinforcing the findings of the analysis, they serve as an invitation to carry out future research which will contribute to the questioning and permanent follow-up of the proposals made by this transnational education project in which higher education postulates are put to a test. Despite being basically a European affair, beyond its borders, the whole world has laid its eyes on the scopes and limitations of this huge effort and is affected by it.

1. Concern for quality, myth or reality?

Undoubtedly, at this time of important challenges and new social demands, search for quality becomes a concern shared by all higher education stakeholders, since it is acknowledged that this level of education affects, immediately and significantly, not only the individual but also the whole society, its development and wellbeing. In this line, addressing the needs of the current world demands the individual to achieve a high development of their social, ethical and political dimensions. However, such integration is hindered by a stagnant quality model which prioritizes products and results over processes, thus revealing the need for a constant review of what is understood by quality, the paradigms which support it and its scopes.

In the last decades, the attempts to improve the quality of university institutions have become more and more evident, so that concern for coverage has paved the way for direct attention regarding quality. According to Buendía and García (2000), while in the 1960s the main goal was coverage, and thus the admission of an increasing number of students, in the 1970s the tendency was to install a management system of the university process in order to guarantee effectiveness and efficiency; but it was in the 1980s that the improvement of the quality of the service became a priority.

In fact, the effort for coverage was the first to be addressed by many education policies which aimed at ensuring schooling for everyone. However, extending the possibilities to enjoy this legal right is not sufficient if the quality of the service is not good. Thus, it becomes essential to go beyond this and many organizations have drawn attention to the importance of being conscious of the fact that 'efforts should not only be invested on coverage extension itself, but also on the creation of conditions

that ensure children and youngsters access to quality, inclusive and multicultural education that fosters diversity and democracy' (OEI, 2010, p. 36).

In this sense, Mendoza (2007) rightly points out that all those involved in the university community demand the university to offer a high quality service and that it takes into account individual, group and social needs. In fact, today's society's demand to this sphere of training goes well beyond command of knowledge and information and communication technologies. It aims at training autonomous and participative citizens that lead socio-economic transformation processes. Under the circumstances, the higher education system is expected to manage to combine high levels of self-regulations with significant rates of accountability, in order to ensure the fulfilment of such long yearned quality.

As Petruta y Cantemir (2012) claim, concern over quality in higher education is not recent. Throughout the years, different positions have been assumed regarding assessment, follow-up and improvement of the several components that make up the higher education system, that is to say, its forms of government and management, its curricular configuration, its pedagogical commitment, among others. However, what has in fact been constant in the political agenda of recent decades is the concern for assuring this quality on a permanent basis.

That said, this challenge of establishing factors that point out what a quality system is, as well as identifying strategies to reach it, is bigger when such aspiration is not solely concerned with a national education system but also addresses a transnational sphere as the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), into which not only different forms of organization converge, but also different interests and management styles. Therefore, quality analysis within this frame of possibilities of coordination, which

poses common elements of reference, becomes not only relevant but necessary.

1.1. The concept of quality and its dimensions

Once evinced the common interest of ensuring quality education, the first expected step is determining its definition and associated factors and dimensions with the purpose of establishing shared criteria to reach it. Nevertheless, it is impossible to guarantee a uniform treatment of quality and many times the very same leaders foster ambiguous landscapes which demand an analysis of the ideological choices and policies behind the constant changes which have taken place in the context of higher education and that reveal some inconsistencies between discourse and practice. Just as confirmed by Rue (2007, p.29):

In political statements on higher education, a series of references can be found which far from clarifying the university which way to go, often bring about confusion. Thus, when in different official statements regarding changes in the EHEA arguments are based on 'efficiency', 'employability', 'market', 'competence' or 'mobility', it is not clear (or perhaps it is) what is ideological and what seem to be instructions for the university, nor is what basically should be assumed separated from what is arguable.

Faced to this reality, also applicable to the concept of quality, and taking into account that discourse, beyond being a meaningful construction, is a social practice which supports social transformation, it becomes relevant to analyse which concept of quality lies behind discourses produced by EHEA, bearing in mind that political processes, including those involved in teaching, are discursive by nature (Saarinem, 2005). In fact,

within the framework of EHEA, quality ranks so highly that it reflects both this concept and the visions of higher education implications, scope and challenges, which has become a model for education policies in other places, such as in Latin America.

Providing a precise definition of quality is in itself a complex task. Within the frame of market and mercantilism, quality is probably much more demarcated, but in education it has a polysemic nature, since its comprehension depends on the context of elaboration and the consensus it may generate within academic community. In this sense, it is quite difficult to find a single definition, taking into account that it is associated to different aims and political, social and even economic interests, all of which requires understanding it in its context if the aim is to unveil the elements that shape it and also a thoughtful analysis which allows establishing both its scope and limits. Indeed, some authors claim that it is a contextual and comprehensive concept, as well as dynamic and ongoing (Gallego & Rodríguez, 2014; González, 2000).

In fact, it is assumed that “from an etymological conception with absolute value it has moved on to be regarded as an emerging, contextual, polysemic and comprehensive concept” (González, 2000, p. 50). Other research reinforce this by characterising quality as a term which is dynamic (it changes with time), polysemic and lacking univocality, since diverse personal and professional perceptions coalesce into it (Gallego & Rodríguez, 2014). Seen in this light, quality is also regarded as tendency, path and a continuous construction process (Valdés, 2008).

In this attempt to understand the concept of quality, especially within the frame of higher education, several approximations associated to interests and purposes subjected to organisation logics have arisen. It is not claimed in vain that “debates centred around ‘inside’ understanding of this notion have given way to

others related to its utility and especially to those who participate in its definition and accomplishment” (Perellon, 2005, p.53).

It is precisely within the frame of these debates that some insights which enable us to come near to a definition based on its intentionality arise. One of these taxonomies is put forth by Schindler, Welzant, Puls-Elvidge and Crawford (2015), who claim that quality may be understood according to purpose (institutions and services which comply to a series of standards and requirements, usually established by regulatory agencies), excellence and prestige (goods and services that achieve excellence by complying with high standards and thus stand out over others), transformation (goods and services that achieve a positive effect on students’ learning) and finally, accountability (institutions and services which render account to those interested in the optimal use of services and the offer of proper education goods and services).

In accordance to this classification, these authors propose a conceptual model which offers a series of indicators associated to the different nuances quality may have in relation to its purpose. From this perspective, quality as purpose is associated to fulfilment of mission, transparency of the processes and attainment of specific goals. Regarding quality as a transformation endeavour, it includes indicators such as critical thinking and strengthening of reading-comprehension skills. Quality aimed at excellency includes categories such as prestige, credibility, rankings and all those factors that show the system or institution occupies a higher place than others. In this sense, it is associated to the academic and social reputation of some institutions. Finally, quality regarded as accountability is focused on continuous improvement and preparing students for employment, among other factors. Figure 1 illustrates the described model.



Figure 1. Conceptual model of quality depicting broad and specific strategies for defining quality.

(Source: Schindler, Welzant, Puls-Elvidge & Crawford, 2015, p.7)

Now, these portions could be seen from the two big trends encompassed by quality: accountable and exceptional would be on efficiency's side while purposeful and transformative would be seen from the need of change and equity. According to Canon and Levin (cited by Afonso, 1998), there is a permanent struggle between forces which put pressure on higher efficiency related to the reproduction of skills required by the system, and others which campaign for more democracy and equality in education. This dual perspective is correlated with formal quality, meaning skills to develop methods to deal with challenges faced by society, and on the other hand, political quality, understood as active participation of individuals as historical subjects in collective construction (Davok, 2007).

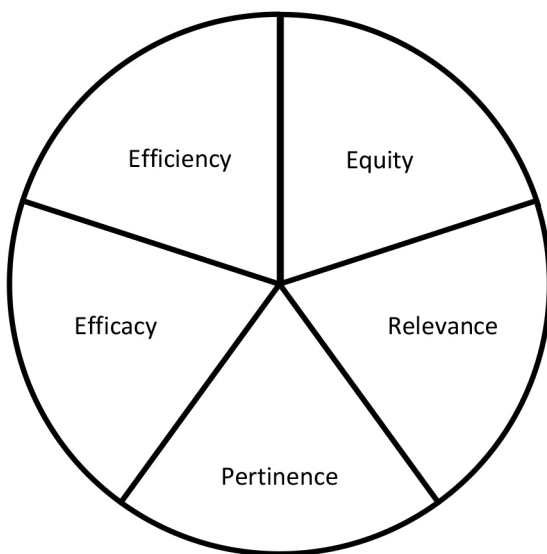


Figure 2.Dimensions of quality according to UNESCO

Within the framework of political and social quality, and consequently from its transforming purpose, problems such as the need to acknowledge the characteristics associated to the social and economic environment of the students arise. Thus, quality education “promotes full development of each person’s manifold potentialities through socially relevant learning and education experiences appropriate to the needs and characteristics of individuals and the contexts in which they find themselves” (Regional Bureau of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean – OREALC-UNESCO, 2007, p.5). On this basis, the understanding of quality from five interdependent dimensions, though so highly interrelated that absence of one of them may alter the whole concept, is promoted. These dimensions are: equity, relevance, pertinence, efficacy and efficiency (see Figure 2).

In respect of *equity*, education should offer “the resources and necessary aids so that every student, according to their skills, reach the highest possible levels of development and learning” (*ibid*, p.12). *Education for all* thus becomes a principle of quality. Some authors even associate this characteristic to the notion of justice (Seibold, 2000) and some highlight that this stance leads to a more humane interpretation of the technical rationalization of quality (Braslavsky, 2006). This implies not only equity of access, but also of resources and processes so that everyone reaches results in accordance to their possibilities.

For its part, *relevance* is associated to coherence between educational purposes and current and future demands of society, which in the case of higher education, are related to such processes as globalization and knowledge society. According to OREALC-UNESCO (2007), education is relevant “as long as it fosters meaningful learning from the point of view of social demands and personal development” (p.14). In this sense, educational purposes determine processes and consequently, results, and should be coherent with current, and even future, demands of society and humankind.

In close relation to the previous dimension, we find *pertinence*, understood as respect and consideration for personal and social characteristics and needs in specific contexts. This means guaranteeing processes which, emanating from specific contexts and cultures, manage to converse with that immediate experience of subject and community. Researchers such as Barret et al (2006) associate this dimension to external effectiveness and social and individual development. In the same vein, Buendía and García (2000) reinforce the importance of this dimension in higher education by asserting that “pertinence is defined as congruence between context expectations and institutional offers (external dimension) and congruence between the institution’s

teleological platform and the resources and procedures employed for their attainment” (p. 210).

Lastly, we find the *efficacy* and *efficiency* dimensions, related to the attainment of goals and responsibility in the use of resources respectively. These aims are supported by an obligation derived from respect to citizen’s conditions and rights, not from an economic imperative (OREALC-UNESCO, 2007). In effect, they do not aim at valuing quality exclusively according to academic results, since it may prove excessively restrictive or simplistic, but rather try to account for a phenomenon not as linear and predictable as a production system, within the traditional concept of “total quality”, although thanks to it some advance has been made towards the comprehension of education as a system.

Sayed, taken up by Barret, Duggan, Lowe, NikelandUkpo (2006), is one of its most staunch critics and claims that through this perspective, only a partial definition of quality can be attained, both because its result is incomplete and because it emanates from the judgement of just a part of society. Likewise, it is claimed that educational achievement is assumed one dimensionally and is associated only to results and therefore, does not adapt itself to the particularities of the different educational systems

For their part, Barrett et al (2006) agree with these dimensions and also include another key one: *sustainability*, which turns out being the least highlighted in the pertinent literature. It implies that all considerations made in relation to the other dimensions should not be only about the present, but also the future. From this perspective “Quality education emerges in the context of the obligation to establish and sustain the conditions for each and every individual, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, race, or regional location, to achieve valued outcomes” (p. 15). Furthermore, these authors point out that these dimensions may be the basis to analyse innovation in education.

Facing this diverse scenario of understandings and topics to prioritise, we could confirm Estevão's conclusion (2012), who claims that the question of quality is above all, a matter of choosing a certain kind of quality over others which could be considered. Thus, "ela justifica-se, por exemplo, pelo apelo ora ao mundo cívico para salientar a promoção da igualdade diante do ensino, ou então, ao mundo doméstico em nome da maior proximidade relacional dos actores escolares" (p. 103). To sum up, and going back to our initial postulate, quality is historically and socially conditioned, therefore, it is determined by philosophical, sociological and pedagogical ideologies (Valdés, 2008).

2. Dimensions of quality underlying EHEA discourse

European higher education systems have gone through great changes in accordance to the different national and international needs. Among them, as stated by the Euricyde report (2008) "More recently, the impact of the Bologna Process on curricular reform, quality assurance, and mobility has become one of the key propellers of change" (p. 11).

Since the formalisation of the Bologna Declaration, it has been established on three main pillars: transparency, mobility and quality (Perellon, 2005). In fact, the main purpose of this declaration was the creation of a higher education area in order to ensure comparability, compatibility and coherence among higher education systems, with the aim of guaranteeing their coordination. It seems that quality is the backbone upon which the other rest, as confirmed by González (2006), who explicitly state that at the Convention of European Higher Education Institutions (2011), quality was regarded as an indispensable condition for trust, pertinence and mobility in the EHEA.

Thus, quality being one of the pillars for transformation, it becomes suitable to identify from which point of view this concept is understood and the factors or dimensions that explain it within the framework of this integrating purpose. This will allow us to understand the interests that justify this integrating and coordination seeking initiative.

In the different communiqués that inform about the follow-up of the successive agreements on the Bologna declaration, mainly those from ministerial meetings, all the quality dimensions mentioned above frequently appear. However, the efficiency, efficacy and relevance dimensions are highlighted as essential components of quality, while equity is taken as an additional factor linked to social responsibility. Just as Seixas (2010) points out:

As políticas de ensino superior partilham hoje uma agenda global assente num discurso salientando a importância dos sistemas de ensino superior nas sociedades e economias mundiais do conhecimento, e privilegiando o desenvolvimento de sistemas de ensino superior orientados pelo e para o mercado. A lógica económica subjacente a este discurso, sublinhando as questões da competitividade, relevância e eficiência, incentiva a mercadorização da educação e o desenvolvimento da “indústria” do ensino superior. (p.67)

In effect, in the first communiqués that revealed the aims of the EHEA, quality was oriented towards management efficiency and accountability logic and great importance was given to meeting market needs. This is why it was necessary to develop programmes “combining academic quality with relevance to lasting employability” (EHEA, 2001, p.3). Evidently, in the light of the conceptual model proposed by Schindler, Welzant, Puls-Elvidgeand Crawford (2015), quality was seen mainly from the

conceptualization of accountability and associated to all the indicators mentioned to assess that concept: student preparedness for employment, procurement of quality resources, sufficiency of facilities, and focus on continuous improvement.

Later on, in the Berlin communiqué (2003), emphasis was placed on achieving quality education, “The quality of higher education has proven to be at the heart of the setting up of a European Higher Education Area” (EHEA, 2003, p. 3). Already in this communiqué, a two-sided line is highlighted, which despite being far from considering equity as a key dimension of quality, regards it nonetheless as an independent factor which along quality, will strengthen the social dimension of the Bologna process. In this sense, according to this communiqué, the need to improve competitiveness should be balanced with the aim to improve EHEA’s social characteristics, “aiming at strengthening social cohesion and reducing social and gender inequalities both at national and at European level” (EHEA, 2003, p. 1). Furthermore, education is seen as a public asset, and so, as a social responsibility factor.

Though not developed as much as in the previous communiqué, in Bergen (2005) the social dimension of the Bologna Process is slightly mentioned and the need to guarantee proper conditions so that students manage to finish their studies regardless of their social or economic background is highlighted. According to this communiqué: “The social dimension includes measures taken by governments to help students, especially from socially disadvantaged groups, in financial and economic aspects and to provide them with guidance and counselling services with a view to widening access” (EHEA, 2005, p. 4).

During this same year, 2005, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance were set up, which do not refer explicitly to equity. On the contrary, they promote the principles of efficacy and efficiency as key aspects of quality.

The quality of academic programmes need to be developed and improved for students and other beneficiaries of higher education across the EHEA; there need to be efficient and effective organisational structures within which those academic programmes can be provided and supported (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2009, p.14).

In the revision of these standards published in 2015, it is also possible to identify reference to relevance, since it is stated that “institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society” (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2015, p.12).

The London communiqué (2007) highlights some of the main achievements attained in the development of the Bologna plan since its initial signing. Reference is made on the one hand to the advance in ensuring quality and on the other to the social dimension of quality. In relation to the latter, direct reference is made to the importance of higher education in the reduction of inequity and promotion of knowledge. Based on this principle, it is emphasised how important it is that students are able finish their studies without being restricted by their socio-economic conditions. “We therefore continue our efforts to provide adequate student services, create more flexible learning pathways into and within higher education, and to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity” (EHEA, 2007, p. 5)

Nevertheless, it is in the Leuven communiqué (2009) where we find the highest development of equity, mainly in reference to the groups mentioned infra:

Access into higher education should be widened by fostering the potential of students from underrepresented groups and by providing adequate conditions for the completion of their studies. This involves improving the learning environment, removing all

barriers to study, and creating the appropriate economic conditions for students to be able to benefit from the study opportunities at all levels. Each participating country will set measurable targets for widening overall participation and increasing participation of underrepresented groups in higher education, to be reached by the end of the next decade. Efforts to achieve equity in higher education should be complemented by actions in other parts of the educational system. (EHEA, 2009, p.2)

With these words, the calls reinforced to guarantee permanence conditions, not just admission, for all students, including those belonging to the referred groups. Moreover, it is explicitly stated that attainment of this purpose should be a commitment made by all members and components of the education system.

A principle that leads us directly to the equity dimension appears in the Bucharest communiqué (2012), since one of the goals is “to provide quality higher education for all” (EHEA, 2012, p.1). As can be seen so far, some concern to consider equity as a key element to guarantee education is discerned in every report. However, our initial idea is reinforced, despite its importance, equity fails to be regarded as a structural part of quality, therefore inherent to it, but is rather seen as belonging to the parallel line of social responsibility.

Lastly, the follow-up reports evince that there are two different lines, with higher emphasis put on quality. Regarding quality, advance is evident “This report provides strong evidence that quality assurance continues to be an area of dynamic evolution that has been spurred on through the Bologna process and the development of the EHEA” (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015, p.18). In relation to equity, great challenges are still to be faced, “while some progress can be noted, the analysis clearly shows that the goal of providing equal opportunities to quality higher education is far from being reached” (ibid, p.19).

Surely in some countries where difficult social conditions are present, this questioning about quality will make more sense, taking into consideration, for example, that in some countries public expenditure on education increased considerably, while in others, especially those that entered into crisis, it decreased significantly.

3. Final Considerations

The configuration of a coherent and relevant higher education system is in itself a difficult challenge to attend to, and the degree of complexity increases if it is a project that goes beyond the national borders, so that a proposal such as the Bologna Plan, by its integrating nature of such diversity, requires the establishment of common criteria that guide the course of the processes, and clear guidelines so as not to lose sight of the central objective: the pursuit of quality.

In this endeavor, one of the fundamental tasks will be the delimitation of what is meant by quality, and although there is no single definition, the starting point to measure it, and to improve it, will always be the determination of its dimensions and factors. In this way questions as basic as those posed by Grady and Bingham (2003) will always guide the first decisions we can make both for the design of a quality management system, and for the analysis of everything that is associated with it, from practices to discourses. Such questions fluctuate between: is it to be found in reputation or results? Is it carried in the perception of our academic colleagues or our students, or does it exist independently of their opinion? (P.2)

To answer these different questions, some models have emerged that from different perspectives try to explain the

concept in question, and although the starting point of this understanding turns out to be different, it is possible to establish a dialogue between them that allows an integrative and therefore complementary view, rather than an exclusive one. In this holistic view of the models, what has become clear is that there are two trends from which quality is understood. On the one hand, from the attention to results, and therefore related to the effectiveness, efficiency and conception of education as a service; and on the other hand, from the processes, and consequently focused on pertinence and equity, which shows a more social alternative that leads to the understanding of quality as a right that as such should be guaranteed.

A holistic view of the system will allow quality not to be confined only to academic results, but to be determined by the way each component is interwoven with the others, so that within a contextual framework recognized for its potentialities and limitations, a balance is achieved between pertinence, efficacy, efficiency, functionality, sustainability, and beyond that, equity. In other words, it is necessary to review quality based on factors associated with results, but also based on causal factors (Murillo & Román, 2010; Sarramona, 2004).

A multidimensional view of quality, as we have previously projected, implies the conception of education as a right, and not as an asset; which does not seem to coincide with the understanding of this concept in the Bologna process. This is supported by Wielewicki and Oliveira (2010), for whom the intentions of the Bologna plan lead to interpret the process as a commoditization of higher education, with all the implications that this entails.

Indeed, in the framework of the EHEA, despite the attempt to balance all the characteristics that structure quality, it is not enough to treat the dimensions from different perspectives.

Instead, it is necessary to integrate them into a construction in which the threat of failure in one of them, especially equity, has consequences on the quality of education, and this also applies to social concepts, discourses, and practices. It is not enough to emphasize the importance of guaranteeing the same conditions for students regardless of their cultural background, it is necessary that this concern passes from being a matter of social responsibility, and is incorporated into quality. That is, equity, rather than being an added value, becomes the pillar of quality education.

The constitution of a European area of higher education has to be aligned with the logic of services and rights, because the responsibility of the university is twofold, in terms of the concept of quality: responding to the demands of producing knowledge that is applied, and economically useful, and realizing its social and cultural responsibility. In this respect, UNESCO stresses that “quality must pass the test of equity, since a system of education that discriminates against a specific group, whatever it may be, does not fulfill its mission.” In addition, it is assumed that the Bologna plan corresponds to a commitment between countries ready to tackle the reforms necessary to achieve the construction of a more social Europe. (Garmendía, 2009)

It is important to emphasize that social and economic efforts to achieve inclusion will never be too excessive. Consequently, the process of democratization of higher education must continue in order to guarantee equity, both in access and success, thus contributing to strengthening both the individual and collective role in building more cohesive societies, with higher levels of social justice.

Ultimately, it will be necessary to rethink the issue of quality, so that it involves different dimensions, and ensure that this resignification is consolidated within the social and political

budgets, which when oriented towards social progress, give direction to this great proposal. In the words of Wielewicki and Oliveira (2010):

Se compararmos os comunicados iniciais com os mais recentes, pelo menos dois factos se salientam: 1) um processo de unificação de tamanha envergadura e complexidade, mesmo conduzido a partir de uma nítida visão hierárquica – na qual os interesses da Europa devem prevalecer sobre aqueles de cada país membro – demanda tempo e arranjos sociopolíticos de igual complexidade; e 2) os impactos desse processo podem ser maiores do que os inicialmente esperados ou explicitados (p. 226).

This will involve the active participation of educational actors and all those who, considering education as a right, can audit the different actions, and based on a clear and solid standpoint, can question the foundations and intentions, both social and political, of new endeavors and big proposals.

Undoubtedly, it will be necessary for the reflection to be based on what for, and even more on for whom, rather than on how, in this way transcending the functional and instrumental. For Marcelo (1998, p. 431), “talking about quality in education is a debate not exclusively technical but also political and ideological” and Moratalla (2002), for his part, takes the question further by affirming that “quality in education has to be considered not only as a technical, legal, political or administrative challenge, but as an ethical and cultural challenge” (p.5). The challenge is then posed so that as actors of the education system, we can understand what quality implies and, consequently, contribute to its achievement, and also participate as observers of its scope and permanence.

In this extension of quality from the recognition of its ideological, political and even ethical scope, it is valuable to recover some of the principles emphasized by Gobantes (2000) as

evidence that the educational paradigm is increasingly oriented towards the needs of demand, and not necessarily towards the intentions of what is on offer: quality has become a requirement of today's society, it is a factor of change, flexibility and personalization. Quality leads us to quality (the more information is available, the greater the demand for it will be), quality implies commitment, and quality involves many agents(it is not only attributed to teachers), quality in its final state is projected in a culture of quality (it makes sense with the change of attitudes within the institution itself).

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