

## Conferences

# Educational research and researchers: Critical notes

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## INTRODUCTION

In a political and institutional context characterized by a view of research as “one of the principal driving forces of economic growth [and] competitiveness”, as stated in the Project of creation of a “European Research Area”, research in Educational Sciences in Portugal is faced with new problems of significant impact. Tensions between research and rendering of services, criticism and *expertise*, creativity and usefulness, among others, seem to be growing in a framework named by some as “academic capitalism”, with the correlated emergence of the entrepreneur-researcher who acts in a context of competition and tries to functionally address new social problems. On the other hand, Education is a concept in accelerated change, at-risk of being politically represented as archaic and easily replaceable by alternative concepts and therefore liable to be transformed in the field of action of competent professionals of innovation and knowledge industry, though restricted to service rendering and submitted to the agendas of the State, private actors and all sorts of sponsors.

It is now time to discuss the political, epistemological and pragmatic guidelines affecting research and researchers in field of Educational Sciences, both at national and international levels. Time has also come to analyze the specific problems of this field, its potential and the perspectives for the future still waiting to be addressed.

This text results from personal notes shared in a peer forum, the *I Forum on Research in Educational Sciences*, which took place in the Institute of Education of the University of Lisbon in October 2009. The Forum organizers decided to publish these reflections despite their occasional and relatively provisional nature. Consequently, I decided to keep the marks of its original production context, namely a quite querying style and even some suggestions arising from problems currently lived, such

as the recently published results of the process of external evaluation of all Portuguese research units working in the field of Educational Sciences. At stake is a critical contribution to the analysis of research policies and practices, evaluation of educational research units in Portugal, researchers’ role, and vocations of the academic activity in this field.

## COMPETITIVE RESEARCH TOWARDS ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

Particularly from 2008 onwards the purpose of the creation of a *European Research Area* has been focused on the issue of this Area’s “global governance”, driven forward by the so-called *Ljubljana Process* (CEU, 2008), another transnational process hardly debated among the European academics. Commitment to the European Union, the “open method of coordination”, privileged articulations with the *Bologna Process*, benchmark-based monitoring processes, among other typical resources of the present phase of the European construction, will eventually lead to the success of the new governance of research.

The starting point is the politically admitted fear that “Europe might not successfully achieve the transition to a knowledge-based economy”, which led to the creation of a European Research Area based on the premise that “research and technology provide one of the principal driving forces of economic growth [and] competitiveness” (CCE, 2000, p. 5), which is besides in tune with the *Lisbon Strategy*. As can be concluded from the analysis of different policy documents, the new rationale for the governance of research in the European Union is based on a strategy targeted at “modernizing European companies” and “sound competition” on transnational markets. Tighter proximity to companies, research centre

networks, competition between public and private sectors, assuming expert roles before economic and political decision-makers are some of the key ideas of the European research policy (CCE, 2000; CEU, 2008).

It is also stated that in Europe research should become useful, socially responsible and competitive, combining elements of cooperation with elements of competition. Though apparently contradictory, these elements represent the core of the logic of several ongoing “processes” in the fields of Education and research (Bologna, Copenhagen, Ljubljana), which I have been naming as *systemic convergence towards competitive divergence* (Lima, 2010; Lima, Azevedo & Catani, 2008). By systemic convergence I mean a normative system based on detailed and standardized rules, served by evaluation devices aiming at producing a certain structural and morphological isomorphism among distinctive units, practices or objects being evaluated, therefore integrating a certain diversity though acceptable and recognizable by the system. This systemic integration of diversities which operates in the sense of harmonization”, as it is preferably named to avoid accusations of homogenization or standardization, is indispensable to enable competitive divergence. Actually, converging to diverge or integrating to differentiate, these are the processes that support the construction of a competitive and hierarchic system capable of introducing rivalry and concurrence as key elements (Lima, 2010) and articulating research and innovation.

The *Green Paper on the European Research Area* (CCE, 2007) assumes as an objective the increase of financial support to research, namely through European programmes while promoting specialization by country or region, trying to reach a *European internal market for researchers*, through articulating innovation and lifelong learning and encouraging the private sector to become the main financial source, assuring about two thirds of the recommended 3% of GDP. Research and innovation, common market, competitiveness, private investment, specialization, these are some of the main typical terms of the new political wave.

However, contradictions and paradoxes frequently arise when comparing European political goals and the starting points of some EU Member States. While claiming for more interesting research careers, capable of attracting “young talents”, in Portugal for example, we have been witnessing a progressive proletarianization and precarization of young PhD graduates as a result of an unprecedented investment in postgraduate education. Yet, they have been nowadays faced with closed doors in most higher education institutions, since shortage of public funds and relative disconnection between science policies and higher education policies have literally prevented them from signing new contracts, not even to ensure mere replacements of retired teachers. Besides, such disarticulation is felt at several levels and

it is also patent in the new statute for higher education teachers where general rules for teaching placements admit the possibility of total inexistence of previous preparation and experience. This is also contradictory with discourses uttered in the sequence of the Bologna process insisting on the importance of pedagogy in the teaching practice and on the professional development of the teaching staff.

Increasingly subordinate to economy, as characterized by several authors, the academic world is indeed facing a dilemmatic situation. In this context, Jan-Erik Lane (2007) refers the tensions between higher education as faithful to the academic culture and to a critical and problematizing tradition, seeking for the truth and capable of defying the State and both public and private powers, and higher education as incapable of being independent from the government and the private sector, yielding to the interests of market and respective agendas, functionally adapted to the purposes and imperatives of economic competitiveness. Trading academic knowledge, merchandizing research and integrating them in the transnational industry of tradable and competitive knowledge already belong to the second alternative. Knowledge as a public good is in crisis. In this context a new researcher profile emerges not only in private laboratories or R&D departments but also in public institutions: the entrepreneur-researcher, innovator, University-qualified enterpriser, a fierce competitor who drives his/her success from external funding and from being capable to positively responding to “competition through provision” in environments characterized by deregulation, resource shortage and market-based mechanisms (Lane, 1997). In certain countries the paradigm of the academic “superstar” has already emerged, someone with high institutional mobility, always traveling from country to country and multinational enterprises, capable of millionaire contracts, assembling large teams of collaborators, multiplying subordinates thus strengthening their institutional power, maintaining their departments with low risks or even expanding them.

*Entrepreneurship* and the creation of new industries are regarded by many academic sectors as two of the most relevant elements of the new mission of higher education institutions. The new academic entrepreneur, which is typical of the increasingly dominant Anglo-American University, appears as a hybrid and complex construction driven from different sources of legitimacy and crossing different subcultures. Traditionally being a “professional officer” in the sense attributed by Max Weber (1973) and in contrast with “political officers”, s/he increasingly affirms him/herself as an expert in the light of the techno-instrumental rationale. S/he can be a highly skilled and competent provider of qualified and economically valued services, a key element in the techno-structures of internal and external advisory

bodies (Lima, 2007a). On the other hand, s/he can alternate from expert and professional of science to entrepreneur, simultaneously inhabiting the world of economy and the academy, between the search for academic *status* and economic-entrepreneurial success in *interface* organizations or consortia, capable of articulating the academic *ethos* with the entrepreneurial *ethos*, and the small scale of prototypes, experimental research or case studies with the large scale of generalization, development and mass production.

Yet, side by side with such an upgrading, a third category emerges in the universities and academic units which is regarded as peripheral and hardly competitive: academics as wage laborers in open competition, most of them proletarianized and sometimes bound to the institutions by precarious contracts, systematically subjected to evaluations targeted at enhancing competitive performances, many of them alienated from research policies imposed on them, from the use made of research outcomes, from the trade of products or patents they contribute to create.

In his speech on *Science as vocation*, in 1919, Weber already admitted that science was conferring increasing importance to application, social usefulness, being growingly produced in the entrepreneurial style and “in the direction of the American system” in big laboratories and public and private departments. Then, he said in a fearless way proper of his cultural pessimism: “The large institutes of medicine or natural science are ‘state capitalist’ enterprises” (Weber, 1973, p. 143). In his opinion, the *Americanization* of German University life in the early 20th century was as clear as the proletarianization of its assistant professors, the loss of the artisan nature of academic work even in social sciences (Weber, 1973, p. 144).

The vocation of Science has been changing deeply: science for self-conscienciousness and world awareness became relatively disconnected from interpretation and understanding (“*Verstehen*”), to take as a priority the production of knowledge targeted at rational decision-making, effectiveness and efficiency, competitiveness and economic growth. It is in this context that an academic as a craftsman, namely in the sense recently used by Richard Sennett (2008), contrasts with the entrepreneur-academic, not only the manager of his/her own career or the self-entrepreneur, but mainly the leader of large teams trying to achieve large scale production. At stake is a frequently heteronymous regime of domination which is already inscribed in the so-called “knowledge economy”.

At the same time new institution *rankings* emerge where the Anglo-American model stands out again. In the *ranking* which includes the top 200 universities in the world the world published by *The Times Higher Education* in 2009, the top twenty universities were all of them from English speaking countries: thirteen from USA, five from UK, one from Australia and another from Canada.

This leads to the emergence of first, second and third class academics, some of them regarded as peripheral and at risk of being left away from institutions recently held as “research universities” in the overall context of Humboldt university crisis, which is characterized by disconnection between teaching and research, no longer regarded as indissociable. In ‘research universities’ private funds are quite considerable, postgraduate students tend to prevail and connections with the business world and sometimes with the *military-industrial complex* also get tighter.

A certain academic subclass then emerges: the precarious academics, the ever-scholars, the nomads, suddenly praised for their courage to live in permanent insecurity, for their competitive and adaptative capacity, spirit of adventure and will to break off from the newly-made-hateful ‘inbreeding’ systems. They are the new ‘cosmopolitans’ by contrast with the ‘local’, who are more sedentary and institutionally established according to Alvin Gouldner’s classic distinction (1957, 1958). However, they are made ‘cosmopolitan’ by force or at best by Diaspora. Alternatively they are doomed to be short-term ‘local’ with no career prospects and sometimes deprived from their most elementary social rights. In most cases both are uprooted and used as cheaper labor force, more liable to be intellectually subordinated, with less resources and autonomy to face certain interests, participate in the definition of research policies and strategies, freely assume the authorship over their work and the publication of critical outcomes, or even deny compliance with the *establishment* or the powers behind funding and contracting systems. Not to speak of the possibility to simply claiming for a different status and professional position or even working in their own country.

Yet, even for the professionally established staff, Stephen Ball’s “terrors of performativity” (2002) linked to the traditional axiom “publish or perish” are also significant in higher education institutions and research centers. According to several observers, new terrors and new axioms of commercial nature have also been added, such as “stay on the market or vanish”, “sell or perish”. In this context, in an organizational analysis of University from a psychoanalyst perspective, Burkard Sievers (2008) came to the conclusion that this institution is dominated by ‘magic thinking’, made of unshakable beliefs in the value of economy, market and management. Even education has been re-conceptualized as a promoter of Human Capital, Human Resource Management, employability and mobility, qualifications and competences with a view to achieving economic competitiveness: it is no longer the concept of education that has been underlying the pedagogic thought for the last two hundred years even considering its multiple perspectives. Yet, rather than science, ‘magic thinking’ guides economic and managerial trends of European university

reforms, expressively named by some as the “Humboldt nightmare” (Schultheis, Roca i Escoda & Cousin, 2008): a ‘nightmare’ particularly for human and social sciences, since they are generally regarded as dysfunctional before the dominant paradigm of social usefulness where competition, useful and economically relevant knowledge, quality and excellence, evaluation and accreditation can be counted among its key features. Even the concept of ‘meritocracy’ has been devoid of its critical and negative connotations, as admitted by Michael Young in his classic work of 1958, being now raised and with no reserves to the rank of fair and ethic-moral principle to be followed by the academy, which is supposed to prize merit and govern by merit regardless of inequalities. Sievers (2008) concludes that such “magic thinking” is nothing but economic and managerial ‘magic thinking’ which being used as a basis in our insistent attempts to reform universities will produce what he names as the ‘psychotic university’.

## RESEARCH POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN EDUCATION

The concept of science and the vocation of science have been under revision within the scope of social policies and also in cultural and institutional terms, clearly unveiling a more or less naturalized transposition of various criteria considered typical of science and respective technological applications to the core of human and social sciences, including, of course, the sciences which study educational phenomena. In the midst of these, however, and in view of their assumed diversity, we are dealing with a transposition with different impacts, perhaps with minor consequences or at least with more manageable requirements in certain research areas such as educational technology, science education, health education or certain specific didactics, for example. That is to say, probably in those specialities where there is a greater area of intersection between research in Educational Sciences and certain scientific and technological sectors, or subjects in the traditionally designated *exact and natural sciences*, although even here the epistemological and methodological options of researchers are not indifferent.

Nevertheless, in general it is sufficient to remember the imposition of bibliometric criteria and forms of measurement and comparison (mainly foreign to the tradition of human and social sciences); the pressures to publish in English, preferably from the consistent sources of *ISI Web of Knowledge*, which is self-defined as “the most comprehensive and versatile platform of research available”; the ever-growing devaluation of the book which, until only a short time ago, was the highest symbol of dependability for a *scholar* in Humanities; the relative devaluation of more conceptual and abstract

theoretic work; the search for application with criteria typical of the techno-sciences; the academic prestige resulting from the obtaining of considerable financing for the institutions, the connection with businesses, the internationalization with central countries; the growing commendation of the quantitative methods and the virtues of the statistic generalization in large-scale observation contexts, favouring the nomothetic approach against the ideographic one; the valorisation of the techno-scientific assistance and expertise, especially via the so-called “evidence-based policies”; the priority conferred on the work undertaken by large teams and the academic production under a regime of co-responsibility, with the reciprocal bias to under-value individual work and, above all, more time-consuming work undertaken over the long term. Among others, if the above criteria were applied to human and social science academics of the 20th century (even if only to the second half), they would perhaps leave the majority, and certainly many of its greatest exponents, in delicate evaluation situations. Despite being forced to be much more productive and international than a large part of our teachers, we will hardly get a favourable judgement in the future. A positive assessment of our work would probably have to overvalue the quantity, rapidity, linguistic diversity, competitiveness, variety of countries and publication formats at the time of assessment: the evident flaws in our knowledge, the mistakes and inaccuracies committed, the superficial understanding of the work of others, the negligence of many authors (in certain cases those closest to us), the reproduction of fashionable quotations, the lack of critical dialogue with the authors and academic controversy, the superfluities, repetitions and variations on the same topic when not on the same or similar data.

As for the researcher in education in particular, the central questions are those already mentioned and many others which are also due to the lack of tradition and consolidation which is still patent among us. Is the prime vocation of the educational researcher to be an intellectual, a technician, a consultant, or a counsellor? Or do they aspire to be recognized as publicists or commentators? Or establish themselves as entrepreneurs? Should they research for the public or preferably dedicate themselves to certain clients? Do they practice a science of State, aspiring to the status of advisors to the Prince, succumb to the Market, or strengthen their autonomy and accordingly select privileged interlocutors?

Certainly the plurality of the profiles and individual options are not in question (being, in fact, similar in other scientific areas), but rather the dominant academic images and social representations which influence the characterization of the field of Educational Sciences. All in all, it is not indifferent to the analysis of the problem to observe what is happening with the



concept of *education* in political and social terms since it significantly lost centrality in certain contexts.

In general and in terms of educational policies, the concept of education seems to have been overtaken by the increasing reference to the concept of training even when the attempt for the two to work together is announced. The question in many cases is the subordination of certain objectives, pedagogic models, didactic methods or techniques of participation and mobilization (not only of school origin but, frequently, also of non-school nature), to presently dominant contexts of continuous professional training, or *vocational training*, as it is referred to nowadays. In effect, in the context of European Union policy documents, the designation *VET* — *Vocational Education and Training* has become so central that the other traditions and models of education (for adults, liberal, popular community, for development, etc.) have become peripheral and with a negative connotation under the generic designation of *NON VET* — *Non Vocational Education and Training*. The English government, for example, several years ago removed the word education from the official designation of the respective Ministry, and in 2007 approved a plan to become a “skills world leader” up until 2020, through what was called a “revolution of functional abilities”. The Higher Education institutions may themselves be turning away from an education paradigm, since knowledge building and its commercialization seems to be a much appreciated alternative. It is in this context that Hermínio Martins (2007) acidly admits that universities may be in a process of changing to “Centres of Advanced Abilities”. And also, “*edutainment*” arises as a new term, combining *education* and *entertainment*, especially explored by training companies, videogame and games industries considered “educational”, by the production of training and learning kits, frequently distributed through franchise systems. But in the European Union language it is the “lifelong learning” that dominates the speeches and the political programmes. This is a concept more associated with the individual and his/her responsibility to create a competitive “competences portfolio” that will allow him/her to increase the probabilities of becoming “employable” or to keep his/her job, in the face of the demands of the economy. With all of this, it is not surprising that the key-concepts are “qualifications”, “competences”, and “abilities” leaving behind lifelong education and its vocation for individual and collective transformation of life (Lima, 2007b).

Have we thought sufficiently about these transformations? Are we investigating current changes or rather seeking to adapt ourselves to them? Or simply ignoring them? Do we not tend to excessively capitalize speeches, reforms or standards of pedagogist nature, that is, those that exaggerate the role of education, training and learning with a view to transforming society and the economy?

I refer to, amongst others: the pedagogism of learning and qualifications to employability and economic growth; the pedagogism inherent to the Bologna Process with the return to scientific and rationalizing pedagogies, the realm of “objectives”, of “learning outcomes” and the ECTS metrics; the claim for greater protagonism as experts in evaluation, within the framework of evaluation policies of technocratic and neo-positive nature. Among so many other examples, from school management to the new teaching professionalism, if this is the case, who would, after all, need Educational Sciences such as these, especially when the new pedagogic thought — or perhaps we should say post-pedagogic — currently stems mostly from Economy and Management?

Is the social relevance of Educational Sciences not compatible with a distinct intellectual orientation, markedly comprehensive and interpretive, where normativism, which is inseparable of education as a political and cultural practice, cannot be confused with prescription, and the technicity of the educational processes rejects technicist approaches? Are we doomed, so as to be considered useful, to the status of techno— sciences? How do we solve the growing tensions between research production and rendering of services, between criticism and expertise, between creativity and utility?

Without an internal debate, without discussion and criticism, we are already heading towards reproduction and adaptation. I do not know if consensus is possible or even desirable. But discussion is. Distinctive conceptions, policies, vocations and projects of Educational Sciences are possible and are obviously already in the field under different terms, not only among separate institutions and different research centres, but also side by side in the same research units.

I can never help being surprised at how we are able to live together like this. For me, it is a false conviviality. We rather co-exist without trying to build bridges, without discussing our options politically, epistemologically, or pragmatically. To sum up, in most cases we do not have research policies. We do not criticise others, we prefer to ignore them. We do not work on what divides us.

It is clear that we are very diverse in such a miscegenated and plural universe as the Educational Sciences. Not much brings us together, and contrary to what our critics suppose, the little that unites us can rarely be considered positive. It is the low academic status we are attributed; it is the frequent complaint that politicians never listen to us — exactly the opposite of what the majority of the badly informed observers say; it is the indignation of some of us because they have never been invited to appear on television to debate the matters they have been researching for decades, but have been passed over by the said observers and other commentators. But could an esteemed academic field be made of these types of complaints or even of their capacity to overcome them?

Is the status of Educational Sciences something homogeneous and generalized, regardless of the actual people that produce and reproduce them and of the privileged connections with other types of knowledge and scientific communities? Don't we already have examples among us that are inspiring and that point to alternative paths? And a European tradition, not to mention others, where there is no lack of exponents of thought and educational research, before and after the institutionalization of Educational Sciences in modern university systems?

Do we truly believe that it is possible, and desirable, to orientate the educational policies and practices according to predominantly scientific criteria without realizing the technocratic trap that we would fall into? Do we want to turn Educational Sciences into some kind of educational engineering, or fall into "liberal pragmatism", as Wright Mills (1982) said with regard to Sociology?

Can our presence in the media be accepted as an indicator, even if indirect, of our social and academic status? Do we really prefer the role of on-duty commentators that are called to make pronouncements on all issues concerning education, including those with which they are not familiar, as happens in general with the intellectual minds of all scientific fields that achieve the status of media oracles?

I certainly accept various answers to these and other questions, but that does not mean that we should not discuss them taking into consideration the main question: what vocation do we assume for Educational Sciences, on which to orientate our investigation and organize ourselves? I understand the plurality of vocations and even their coexistence, in certain contexts. I accept certain normativism intrinsic, or immanent, to education research, under the risk of false axiological neutrality or a completely depoliticised exercise, even though I uphold that the aforementioned normativism should itself be the object of our research. However, I distinguish between research *in* education and research *on* education, since in the first case, education is more than a simple object of study, possibly built from legitimate fields, but in any case bereft of educational thought, of sharing (even as a criticism) a knowledge that is not only academic, but also cultural and professional. In any case, I don't see myself in prescription, in technicism, in the naive belief in the power of education, pedagogy or didactics, to transform not even school education, never mind the economy and society. I believe that we are those that would be better placed to acknowledge the potentialities of education, and also its limits. It is certain that education does not do everything, contrary to what, among others, was sustained by Helvetius (1773), and James Mill (1823) under his influence, in a scenario of a positivist pedagogy marked by enlightened despotism which nowadays has been re-updated under the auspices of important transnational agencies, such as OECD and even UNESCO,

and underlies the social-political reasoning of the European Union, unendingly repeated by some of the most outstanding gurus of training economy and human resource management.

I am, therefore, a critic of the tendency towards a technical-functional discourse, as much as of the tendency towards a certain moralising discourse, both frequently incorporating the *doxa* and common sense, that should, on the contrary, be our privileged objects of study.

I have nothing against the production of studies, opinions or proposals requested by the political power and, as is of common knowledge, I often participated in that production. But I believe such an activity should not be performed without special care in the generic acceptance of the reference terms and its values — never strictly techno-scientific —, in safeguarding the authorship and the publication of the accomplished work and in the adoption of processes targeted at legitimizing eventual political measures, based on studies carried out. In any case, I do not believe that such an activity is intrinsically academic, but rather political in a broad sense, and as such I do not believe it can be systematic without taking the risk of over determination of research agendas by the political and administrative agendas, whatever the powers implicated.

After all, we should distinguish between socio-educational problems and research problems. Otherwise, we could become confined to the study of and search for solutions to problems such as: the "shortage of qualifications" of the labour force; the lack of "employability" of various courses and programmes; the contribution of vocational training to the "increase of productivity and economical competitiveness"; the study of "labour market needs" in terms of initial and continuous training; the proposal of "the best methods of school management and leadership" to avoid the "irrationalities" of democratic management and collective practices; the search for the right didactic solution...

I believe there are reasons to conclude that, on a European level, the current political context does at least favour a certain liberalizing reformist disposition, pragmatist and utilitarian, in our research. Indeed this is so despite the critical basis that Educational Sciences have inherited in Portugal, from the 25th April 1974, which was referred to several times by Stephen Stoer (1992), among others, when talking about "the 'sociologization' of educational studies". In any case, the prescriptive impulse and the technocrat drift, though confirming the social utility of Educational Studies, would hardly bring about social and techno-rational recognition. They would instead contribute to deprive them of the indispensable conditions for the production of critical and academically sustained knowledge. Yet, this is crucial to the academic, social and educational recognition of Educational Sciences, still very recent and fragile among us,

heterogeneous and full of internal tensions, little respected in the academy, frequently showing studies, publications, academic examinations and competitions where an extreme diversity outstands.

I would say that we need to be stricter and more demanding, even admitting that we have come a long way in the last decades, making it possible today to find studies and essays of great merit and quality, considering the best international standards where they circulate freely. It is, however, imperative that we make every effort to theoretically and epistemologically reinforce our disciplines, overcome traditional limitations, establish points of contact with other related domains, on a basis of reciprocity and equal *status*. To sum up, it seems to me indispensable to create conditions that enable us to abandon a certain defensive attitude, as if we ourselves represented our field as something fragile, with no substance, full of questionable contributions. This is all partly true, but can be changed. As for myself — as I was summoned here to give my testimony —, even accepting the diversity and plurality of Educational Sciences, I reject the hegemony of the technical reasoning they are being imposed, which is centred on the means, in search for the *optimum*. The technologization of Educational Sciences, which is obvious in many educational policy decisions, would in my opinion hinder the reinforcement of their academic status and theoretic and critical contributions, favouring instead the “operationalism” and “decisionism” that would dig their own grave. Even knowing that these are exactly the dimensions which are still tolerated, whether by the official policies targeted at fostering research or by the pragmatic conceptions of initial and in-service training of teachers and other professionals; even knowing that the calls for a technical and instrumental reason are today greater and more convincing than in the recent past. Social and economic usefulness, as we saw, privileged connections with companies and knowledge industry, along with greater competitiveness and new evaluation criteria of research and academic production represent central elements in “academic capitalism” or, as I have also called it, in the context of a *countable education*.

The scarcity of resources, competitive budgets, accreditation and evaluation, attraction of postgraduate students and external financing, rationalization of the network of institutions, promotion of mergers and consortia, creation of service companies are indelible marks and signs of the times we live in. I believe that in a few years we will be evaluated on a European scale, in accordance with European standards, which besides have already been established in the case of teaching projects.

## EVALUATION AND PERSPECTIVES FOR THE FUTURE

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE, 2009) has been keeping a document entitled *Research Excellence Framework* under consultation since late 2009 aiming at establishing the new bases for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions.

This document reaffirms some mechanisms already underway such as *rankings* by scientific area and selective allotment of resources, together with the use of selective bibliometric indicators and citation information, assessment of impact on economy and society, assessment of research units’ portfolios which include world level research work, effective impact on economy and society, knowledge sharing and dissemination, knowledge application by *stakeholders*.

This evaluation focuses on the research unit and not the researcher and relies upon a selection of outputs by unit. Only high quality outputs with social impact are to be considered and evaluation is also supposed to comprise the research environment, infrastructures and dissemination of knowledge produced. Such evaluation is conducted by experts having quantitative indicators (*standards*) as a basis and it should be carried out every five years. The unit is supposed to select the researchers and four or five outputs by researcher, including books, theses, reports, statements, studies, consultancy work, etc. ‘Rigour, originality and significance’ are the key dimensions of evaluation, with some specific criteria for human and social sciences which are not expected to use citation information in evaluation procedures. Assessment of impact includes benefits to the economy, society, culture, public policy and services, health, the environment, international development and quality of life and units will be assigned a number of stars as a result: four for exceptional, three for Excellent, two for Very Good, one for Good and zero for Unclassified.

English pragmatism is notorious and so are several trends mentioned before. Any evaluation system is nowadays competitive and hierarchic since it is rooted in a concept of quality which is held as a necessarily scarce and differentiating attribute.

Despite of all, I think the proposed system might be less blind and positivist than the one being implemented in Portugal. Besides, the evaluation referents have never been submitted to discussion, consultation or negotiation among institutions and researchers. The bureaucratic dimensions of the implementation of external evaluation have been made clear not only by the uniform and standardized application of criteria and evaluators’ disregard of socio-cultural and academic contexts, but also by an emphasis on indicators of quality and *status*, which are more typical of science and technology.

Notice that the quality of publications is mostly deduced from the place and language of publication. Productions in Portuguese, and possibly in other languages such as French, Spanish and Italian, are despised and not even read since external evaluators are rarely proficient in these languages, even when at stake is a combination of the most used languages in the world as is the case of Portuguese and Spanish. All this for lack of contextualization of the evaluation undertaken, which has been made so universal, so codified and insular that signs not recognized as pertinent are simply ignored and hence publications' contents, particularly those written in languages regarded as profane and of low academic prestige. This is the result of objectivity and impartiality, both based on the praise of distance and separation between evaluators and evaluated, or subjects and objects of evaluation, thus avoiding the presence of Portuguese researchers, which in the case of course evaluation has been qualified as *friends evaluating friends* (ENQA, 2006). The farther this distance in geographical, cultural and linguistic terms, the greater the appearance of objectiveness, no matter the lack of sense it often makes among the evaluated which contributes to an increasing perception of lack of legitimacy.

Aren't there experts enough in these matters among us? What has prevented us from building an alternative agenda to be proposed to the Portuguese foundation for science and technology, *Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT)*? Is it acceptable that research units where we work are assessed on the basis of referents we do not accept or do not partially recognize? Can research evaluation neglect critical judgments on the quality of the texts we write and research outcomes published? Can internationalization policies be geographically and linguistically selective and inconsiderate of priorities defined by the institutions and research teams? Is postgraduate education a matter of mere number of Master dissertations and PhD theses defended, regardless of their impact on the consolidation of research in national and foreign higher education institutions? Are *ISI Web of Knowledge* and citation information easily applicable to us and are they fit to our work? Shouldn't research units' editorial projects be particularly valued, mainly academic journals of international circulation? Is it acceptable to undermine these and other dimensions, including the attraction of postgraduate and postdoctoral students only because they come from Portuguese speaking countries?

Questions would be innumerable particularly if each unit's specific features are to be taken into consideration. Besides, research units are mostly composed of teaching staff members who also do some research, which seems to be forgotten when evaluation takes place.

We are then faced with multiple problems particularly regarding the academic strengthening and consolidation of Educational Sciences in a context of diversity; Educational Sciences' different vocations, sometimes hardly

compatible; research policies and practices, institutional projects and evaluation of research units.

Acting collectively and in a concerted way in institutional terms seems indispensable to me, no matter how opposed this might be to any rivalry these official evaluation and funding policies might have fostered among us. The creation of a forum (even if informal) or standing committee of educational research units could mean a significant step forward towards the production of analysis, studies, proposals and fostering a constructive dialogue with the political power. In formal terms, there is nothing against the creation of an association of research centers. Articulation with the Portuguese society of educational sciences, *Sociedade Portuguesa de Ciências da Educação* (SPCE), seems opportune, together with intervention in the higher education coordinating council, *Conselho Coordenador do Ensino Superior* (CCES), and the future FCT scientific council where Educational Sciences are represented.

There are, indeed, innumerable problems to be tackled, some of them of considerable complexity. Yet, the potential of our field is not to be despised namely considering the following achievements: a number of PhD graduates, doctoral and master students and research units with no parallel in Portuguese history; a considerable capacity of attraction of postgraduate and postdoctoral students, namely Portuguese or from Portuguese speaking countries, particularly from Brazil; the existence of a small number of scientific journals, with regular publication, indexed to international databases and with growing academic prestige, inwardly and externally; interchange with foreign institutions and researchers, mainly from Europe and Brazil; organization of scientific meetings and international congresses in high numbers and frequency; an increasing amount of works published abroad or in foreign languages, although this is simultaneously viewed as a weak point as systematically pointed out by external evaluators.

For someone who has been working in the field of Educational Sciences for three decades and critically reflects about it, I must recognize that in aspects like the above mentioned and in many others this field has never before been so strong. However, it is also important to notice that the academic world went through considerable change, demands increased considerably and we started to be overwhelmed by evaluations and international comparisons regardless of our lack of tradition, geography, language and culture.

We must be academically more demanding, in certain cases much more demanding than ever, which does not mean we should passively accept unilateral evaluation criteria. This is an extra reason for further debate, more perspective sharing, more compromise, so that we can achieve strategic dimension and bargaining power with the "Evaluator-State" about science policy.



Therefore, it is indispensable that all parts involved have enough autonomy, define their own policies and are willing to cooperate. That is, choosing solidarity rather than rivalry, something not so easy to achieve nowadays unless we realize that in the long term no winner will come out of a purely competitive strategy.

I do not know if this is possible for all the units not even if it is necessary, since any reorganization to avoid fragmentation will always depend on policies adopted and scientific perspectives defined. One possible step forward might be the creation of top level coordination and cooperation structures among present research units. However, this is not a process to be conducted by mere addition, heedless of priorities, self-evaluation, selection of leaders, sharing of experiences and resources.

Even in such a scenario, I dare say I'd rather hold out against a good deal of "Big Science" mechanisms and utilitarian innovation (Lane, 2007) and keep faithful to the vocation of critical understanding and, to the utmost, to an Adornian criticism of science as domination or in Hannah Arendt's words (1984, pp. 305-306) as part of the process of "instrumentalization of the world" based on the hegemony of the "principle of utility".

Anyway, as I see it, an instrumental and strictly applicable perspective of Educational Sciences, in a technicist and prescriptive manner and functional towards dominant powers, will precisely be the one that less contributes to the academic consolidation of this field, its interpretative and critical function or even its social and educational relevance.

Finally, it should be added that such a context, that is, the context of so-called "policy sciences" is precisely the one where we can be most easily replaced or made redundant, which partly seems to be happening through the competent and acquiescent activity of study departments, inward advising structures, external advisors and consulting companies, new evaluation and science management professionals, experts in prospective studies, advisors and other categories typical of techno-sciences. Besides, this also applies to several areas at the *meso* and *micro* levels from school evaluation to the production of educational projects, or even school management, teacher performance evaluation, or pedagogic and didactic decision-making.

Anyway, all this begs the question whether it would be acceptable to confine the vocation of Educational Sciences and respective researchers to the category of techno-structures which can be co-opted either to mediate between *knowledge* and *power* in a context of policy decision-making or to produce virtuous articulations between *knowledge* and *practice* when it comes to pedagogical practice.

In my opinion, such co-optation is unacceptable and should therefore be rejected, under the risk of loss of autonomy, even if there are costs to be born and education-

al sciences continue to be regarded by some as the main cause of education problems in the republic. Curiously enough, even if they do nothing but pursuing their major goal: studying to better understanding educational phenomena.

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