PARADOXICAL IMAGES OF THE STUDENT IN SPANISH EDUCATIONAL REFORMS (1990-2002)

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Abstract – *After the Franco dictatorship was over, Spanish education entered into an era of educational reforms that culminated in 1990 with the establishment of a new legal regulation of the system that has a distinctly social democratic nature. This situation has encouraged the proliferation of discourses about education, and especially about its principle actors who identities and functions continue to be discussed. In this paper we study the contradictory images about the student (and about childhood in general) that appear in discourses concerning educational reform. We draw upon data taken from interviews with diverse actors in the politics of Spanish education that were conducted as part of a research project supported by the European Commission. This analysis finally extends to the foreseeable and drastic reorientation of these reforms that is being proposed at present by the new conservative government with the Law of Educational Quality.*

Introduction

*T*he second half of the 20th century was an era of great educational reforms in Europe (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 1999). Because of its recent political history, in Spain these reforms were concentrated in the last third of the century and they have had legal expression in three laws of the highest order. The first, the *Ley General de Educación* (LGE, 1970), was issued in the waning years of the authoritarian regime of General Franco. The other two, the *Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo* (LOGSE, 1990) and the *Ley Orgánica de Calidad de la Educación* (LOCE, 2002), were enacted once democracy was restored. In this article, I will review the cycle described by these two most recent reforms, focusing particular attention on the evolution of the political discourse about education. Reproduced in other European countries, each with its own distinctive nuances (Green, Leney & Wolf, 2001), this cycle begins with modernizing, leftist governments of general social democratic tendencies, whose reformist pretensions are gradually moderated over time. It culminates in a conservative politics of greater or lesser intensity. From proclaiming principles such as 'comprehensivity', 'equity,' and 'social integration', politicians pass inexorably to quite different watch-words such as 'efficiency', 'competence' or 'quality'

(Kenway, 1997; Whitty, 2000; Whitty, Power & Halpin, 2000; Bartlett *et al*., 2002).

The socialist reforms of the nineties (LOGSE) emerged as the great reform of the new democratic state, as a grand civic and modernizing impulse intended to enhance the equality of educational opportunities for all without regard to social origin or personal capacities. For its detractors, among whom could be counted many teachers, these initiatives constitute an historic error that could only lead to the deterioration of education and chaos in the classrooms, above all in the case of secondary education. From the very beginnings of these reforms, criticisms of this sort (and others) germinated and grew into widespread discontent that the conservative government of the *Partido Popular* (the Popular Party) canalized and promoted in order to realize its own telling modification of the educational system.

Above all they attacked the notion of 'comprehensivity' considered as the key concept of structural and curricular organization. This turn has its legal basis in the already cited *Ley de Calidad de la Educación* (LOCE), or Law of Educational Quality, still in the developmental stage at this time and under parliamentary discussion. This legal project was presented, on the one hand, as a rectification of the 'egalitarian policy' (a phrase usually uttered with a critical and ironic tone) of the socialist reform and, on the other hand, as a necessary response to the challenges of a global, knowledge-based society. It is in secondary education that one may observe most clearly this conservative 'counter-reformation' (Viñao, 2002), particularly in its vision of distinct and parallel educational tracks (*itinerarios)* into which the students would be sorted according to their academic performance.

Nevertheless, if we examine this development a bit, we can observe that the opposition and rupture suggested by these two moments in the reformist cycle is more rhetorical than real. At least, the transit between one and the other has ended up being much less radical and drastic than one would be led to believe either by listening to their promoters or by reading their respective doctrinaire texts. Educational reforms often serve as arguments for political legitimation and, as such, are not sparing in their rhetoric in order to affirm their necessity and flaunt their alleged coherence and effectiveness (Rodríguez Diéguez, 2001; Pereyra, 2002). Nevertheless, once they encounter resistance they do not hesitate in accommodating political realities to such a degree that ambiguities, paradoxes, and contradictions emerge as they increasingly come to approximate that which at the beginning they criticized. Therefore, and not only in this social terrain, it is evident that with each passing day during this stage of global capitalism, the distance lessens between the educational politics of the moderate left and the conservative right.

This phenomenon is clearly manifest when we observe the processes of identity construction of the subjects implicated in the educational system. For example,

when we analyze the images and ideas entertained about 'the student' and the rules that regulate scholastic success and failure, we encounter reliable guides for interpreting and understanding both the equalizing and the discriminating capacities of the system. This subject will be at the heart of this article.

Educational reform and the construction of the subject: sources and guidelines for investigation

My analysis considers two sources of information. The first, and most important, is a long-term project[1] of comparative research financed by the European Commission, *Education Governance, Social Integration and Exclusion in Europe* (*EGSIE*), conducted during 1998-2000. With this project we attempt to explore the consequences of socialist efforts at educational reform in Spain during the 1990s and to do so in terms of a wider, comparative European context. The second source focuses on the text of the Law of Educational Quality (*Proyecto de Ley de Calidad de la Educación*), which was promoted by the conservative government of the *Partido Popular* in order to modify some of the essential elements of the socialist reforms. I have also included various reports evaluating the educational system and other relevant documents.

EGSIE is a TSER (Targeted Socio-Economic Research) project of the XII General Direction of the European Commission, that was coordinated by the Department of Education of the University of Uppsala, Sweden, led by Professor Sverker Lindblad with the expert collaboration of Professor Thomas S. Popkewitz of the University of Wisconsin at Madison. In addition to the eight European universities participating in the project, an Australian team from the University of Newcastle was involved from the beginning.

Temporally speaking, the project is situated in the postmodern stage of globalization and covers the last decade of the 20th century. From a theoretical perspective, it moves within two conceptual fields that are as complex as they are problematic: *equity* and *knowledge* (Popkewitz, Lindblad & Strandberg, 1999). In speaking of 'equity' we are alluding to 'questions of representation and access of individuals and groups to social and educational practices. Governance, within this perspective, is a concept used 'to think about and judge the means by which activities are controlled or directed to deliver an acceptable range of outcomes according to some established social standard' (Popkewitz, Lindblad & Strandberg, 1999: 2). Inclusion and exclusion are defined in relation to the level of participation that any particular group attains with respect to these standards. With respect to the problematic nature of 'knowledge', we are referring to 'the systems of reason through which identities assigned to actors are *fabricated* to order and

divide'. The consequences that these systems of reason have on social inclusion and exclusion are evident in that they produce rules and principles of distinction and differentiation that regulate action and the participation of subjects in the diverse social spaces in which their lives are traced out.

The general hypothesis of this project begins by verifying that the framework of the restoration of global capitalism and the attendant re-examination of the relations between education and the economy have recently produced a cascade of changes in European educational systems. In many cases, such as the Spanish one (Pereyra, Sevilla & Castillo, 1999) this process has included wide ranging educational reforms. The EGSIE project professes to analyze comparatively these changes and reforms that have resulted from the educational politics of the various European nations. The project takes into account, on the one hand, that the process of globalization is producing similar and new forms of governance of educational systems, with problematic implications for every level of decision making. On the other hand, the project considers that all of these processes have a direct impact on the capacity of education to promote integration and combat social exclusion in those nations which are reclaiming themselves as 'Welfare States.'

The objectives and, therefore, the contents of the project focus on determining and analyzing these recent changes in the governance of European educational systems, establishing the correspondences and contradictions between these new patterns and the historical traditions and presuppositions of education in Europe. This project attempts to determine the implications of the new forms of political direction developing in the organization and differentiation of those systems and, finally, to determine the results that these different political-educational strategies have had on the balance of social integration and exclusion, especially for young people. A small sample of the extensive and meticulous research activity thus far realized on these topics is reflected in the published reports (*inter alia* Lindblad & Popkewitz, 1999; Popkewitz, Lindblad & Strandberg, 1999; Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2000), not to mention the countless reports generated by each team and the voluminous ethnographic material that has been compiled (texts, statistical compilations, taped interviews, etc.). It is neither necessary nor desirable to present here a detailed list of the activities already developed that have been provided in a succession of reports and other publications, but it might be worthwhile to cite the goals of the broad phases of the research project, as follows:

– First, accomplish a detailed description of the educational systems in question and develop national reports.
– Second, analyze the discourse of the institutions and actors in the educational system, including international bodies, politicians and administrators, high

level executives, school principals, teachers, members of civil society (e.g., boards of directors of parents' associations, unions, businessmen, etc.).

– Third, conduct fieldwork in some European regions, based on the use of questionnaires, administered to students of secondary and pre-university education.

– Fourth, produce a final comparative study by constructing a comparative typology for the relevant countries, formulating hypotheses about the change in governance in education and about its impact on social inclusion/exclusion.

– Fifth, and finally, present the results of this work to educational agents of different sorts and discuss conclusions with them.

As can be easily deduced, one cannot address all these goals in the constraints of space imposed by a journal article. I will therefore limit myself to considering the second phase of study outlined above, and even then, that area will not be treated exhaustively. This article centres attention on our analysis of the discourse of political actors relevant to the central questions of our research, but principally I focus on those issues that concern the construction of the subject: that is to say, the role and the image of the student with special reference to the student of secondary education. For over a year we interviewed a large number of politicians in order to evaluate the reforms of 1990. At the time, the majority of these politicians occupied important positions in the educational administration of the Autonomous Community of Andalusia, which was governed by the Socialist Party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, PSOE). One cannot forget that at the very same time the central government of Madrid was controlled by the conservative Popular Party (*Partido Popular*, PP), and that although the control of education in Spain generally falls to the autonomous communities, the general pattern of the educational system are established centrally.

My comments, as I have already noted, are derived not only from the EGSIE project, but also from an analysis of Spanish educational politics since 1996 as they developed under a conservative central government. I want here to observe the progressive development of the reformist ideas of the socialists up to the point that they came to resemble, in part at least, those of the conservatives. These ideas are reflected in the text of the Law of Quality in Education (*Ley de Calidad de la Educación*) and in the reports and documents that led up to the establishment of that legal norm.

At the end of 1996, the Ministry of Education, through its entity, INCE (National Institute of Quality and Evaluation) undertook an extensive study in order to diagnose the educational system, whose manner of functioning had attracted criticism from both inside and outside of the system. This study included almost the whole of the country with the exception of Andalusia, whose

autonomous government (*Junta de Andalucía*) had decided not to take part in it, reflecting the difficult relations that it maintained with the central government. From the very first democratic elections after the dictatorship ended, the Socialist Party has been the most popular party in the Andalusian Community, maintaining control of the autonomous government without interruption during the last two decades. From the moment that the socialists lost the government in Madrid, the confrontation between the new conservative government and the Andalusian government has been a constant.

The evaluation of the school system was organized by a group of University teams led by prestigious professors, albeit those somewhat allied with the *Partido Popular*. They centered their efforts on the obligatory level of secondary education (12-16 years), above all on the second cycle of this stage (14-16 years). They subjected to analysis five problematic aspects of education: student success, the plans and methods of instruction, the functioning of the schools, teacher effectiveness, and relations between the school and the families of the students. After a little more than one year, a number of reports were released about each of these aspects of education. From these a global diagnostic instrument was derived that reviewed the weaknesses of the educational system born of the socialist reform and some changes were proposed that they believed would improve it, especially in the area of compulsory secondary education (*Educación Secundaria Obligatoria*, ESO). In the judgement of these evaluators, the most preoccupying symptoms are the poor success rates of the students, the increase in discipline problems at schools, the insufficient initial and subsequent teacher training and the lack of communication between the family and the school (Ministerio de Educación, 1998; García Garrido *et al*., 1998; Ibáñez Martín *et al*. 1998). It was possible to deduce from the recommendations of the evaluators that while it was certainly necessary to correct these problems and proceed to make the pertinent changes, it could be accomplished without significantly altering the structure of the system and without resorting to a drastic process of juridical revision. Nevertheless, soon after these evaluations and others produced by international institutions (for example, the OECD) came out, the conservative government decided to initiate a reform process that led to the already cited Law of Educational Quality and other measures that, in the long run, would entail structural modifications (Escolano, 2002).

In the midst of an incendiary public polemic, the government produced a 'Statement of Principles' (*Documento de Bases*) for their proposed law in March, 2002. With this theoretical document as its instrument, the Ministry of Education submitted to public opinion its assessment of the school system and its ideas about how to reform it. What relatively little criticism this government initiative aroused among the teachers, emanated from the leftist unions, the pedagogical vanguard

among the teachers, and those associated with socialist educational politics. The bulk of the teaching corps cautiously saw in these changes the possibility of recuperating both order in the classrooms and their lost authority as teachers. On the political plane, however, this development fed a schismogenic spiral[2] that erupted into a very heated confrontation. The Socialist Party responded to the document of the governing Popular Party with its own, entitled *To Educate Citizens: Everyone's Task*, in which it expressed its political alternative for education. The socialists accused the conservatives of favouring policies that were elitist, segregationist and bound to weaken the public school.

Shortly after making its 'Statement of Principles' public, the government approved its proposed version of the Law of Educational Quality. At present this legislation is moving through the parliamentary process and attracting various criticisms from the different groups opposed to the Popular Party. This dispute has spilled out of Parliament and into the street, where it inspires public protests in a renewal of what in earlier times was known as the 'education war'. To understand the reformist cycle in Spanish education in the last decades of the 20th century, one must analyze the legal text itself, the theoretical works which preceded it, and the vast amount of information about its social impact collected through a process of continual observation.

The socialist reforms of the 1990s: the history of an illusion?

If we attend to its texts and public declarations, the socialist school reform (LOGSE, 1990) was presented as a very ambitious attempt at educational change and social transformation. Its proponents did not hesitate to pronounce it to be a crucial turning point in the history of Spanish education and the beginnings of a new era in education. Socialist rhetoric was replete with the millenarian arguments so common to other reformist narratives of that era. (Popkewitz, Pitman & Barry, 1986).

With this educational revision, the socialist government sought to respond to what it regarded as the pressing needs of the Spain of the 1980s: the development of democracy and the welfare state in a country that had just emerged from a dictatorship, the construction of a state composed of Autonomous Communities, the historical convergence of its school systems with those of the European Union (which Spain had joined in 1986), and the improvement of Spanish education in a manner appropriate to its new social and economic context (Boyd-Barrett & O'Malley, 1995; Pereyra, Sevilla & Castillo, 1999; Puelles, 2000; Escolano, 2002).

Without a doubt, one of the most important novelties of the democratization processes has been the desire to convert a state with an ancient centralist tradition

into a decentralized polity with a structure situated mid-way between federalism and regionalism. This new political framework necessarily generated a new educational map, which required a programme of reforms in order to canalize the demand for regional autonomy, improve the management of the system and adapt curriculum to the diverse sociocultural contexts of the country. It is necessary to note that the anti-franquist opposition, in addition to calling for the restoration of conventional political liberties, had considered the right to autonomy for the Spanish 'Nationalities and Regions' to be a fundamental element of its vision of democracy which had been frustrated by the outcome of the Civil War (1936-39) (Boyd, 1997). For many, the struggle against the dictatorship was interpreted as a struggle against the historical centralism of Madrid.

Although the Constitution of 1978 recognized this right, the process of producing political autonomy did not develop at the same pace in all of the Spanish communities. Indeed, only a few chose to implement the procedures necessary to govern education within their respective territories. For a long time the majority of the communities continued to depend upon the central government and only very recently have they begun to take charge of their schools in an autonomous manner. As a result, the current scheme of the autonomies reveals very definite asymmetries and a deficient overall articulation.

On the other hand, although the educational system had been slowly decentralizing, it continued to have a singular organizational structure supervised by the Ministry of Education. Inevitably, jurisdictional conflicts between the regional authorities and the central government are quite frequent. Socialists and conservatives continued to be divided by the level of state intervention that each considered appropriate in matters concerning education, but they coincided in seeking to maintain a national backbone for the system that would be compatible with a decentralized form of management. This basic unity in the system (involving, among other things, a homogeneous structure and some basic elements of curriculum common to all of the country's schools) generally was the object of consistent criticism from the nationalist parties governing some of the communities, especially the Basque Country and Catalonia. For a number of years these parties have sustained a string of conflicts with a succession of central governments about such central issues as language, the teaching of history and the selection of teachers. Indeed, these parties, some of which have a secessionist agenda, have promoted programmes of linguistic immersion in the regional language that have included making the teaching of Spanish difficult within their territories. Moreover, they have substantially altered the content of the humanities curriculum in an effort to construct their own nationalist consciousness in direct confrontation with Spanish identity, which they consider to be an unacceptable historical imposition.

The rapid transformation of the family in post-franquist Spain is another fundamental sociological factor that must be appreciated to understand fully the development of educational reform during the 1990s. This transformation follows a pattern common to the other Western nations (including the massive incorporation of women into the work force, changes in the organization and functioning of family life, the emergence of new familial formats, etc.), but it was produced in less time and more rapidly, in concert with the democratizing process of national political life. In a country with a long Catholic tradition, but one that is experiencing urbanization and economic development, the decline of the classic form of the nuclear family did not occur without conflict (Murphy, 1978, 1983). The most conservative sectors of society have even interpreted these changes as an alarming symptom of the weakness of this institution and of a general deterioration of Spanish society. Nevertheless, the data available to us demonstrates that despite an increase in variety of alternative familial formats and the number of divorces, the greater part of the children of Europe, and this is even more true of Spain, are raised by their parents until they attain adulthood. The family, even when it is mono-parental, continues to play a basic role in the primary socialization of children (Junta de Andalucía, 1999a; Goody, 2001; Luzón y Luengo, 2002). Naturally, this crucial task is increasingly shared by the family with other social agencies.

The decline of the traditional domestic life of women, the instability of married couples, the increasing number of single-parent households (as well as other factors) have combined with the growing delegation of educational functions from the family to the school in causing the school's centrality in the educational process to soar. The school has colonized extra-scholastic spaces, once the privileged domain of families, and the school as an institution is relentlessly exported its typical and preferred patterns of behaviour to the social world beyond its classroom walls. This 'pan-educationalism' not only did not go unnoticed in socialist circles, it was encouraged, as can be discerned in the following words of a highly placed official of Andalusian educational administration:

> 'I believe that the model [of reform] is good to the extent that it is capable of socializing those customs, modes of being and habits that formerly were performed by the family (...) The school has to make up for its deficiencies.'

Nevertheless, and despite a growing convergence, the situation of the family is far from homogeneous within Europe. According to Crounch (1999), marked differences can be observed between the North and the South. For example there is a greater asymmetry in the distribution of household tasks among men and

women in such countries as Italy, Greece, or Spain. In these countries, as well, familial tradition has changed less and there are lower rates of divorce and illegitimacy. On the other hand, their fertility rates are very low.[3] In Andalusia, which is situated at the geographical and social periphery of the south of Europe, most of these tendencies are quite pronounced. One must take into account that Andalusia, despite its manifest evolution, is still below the Spanish average in the principal indicators of development (including, of course, educational indicators), and is distant from the European averages (Iglesias y Ruiz, 1999; Zoido *et al*., 2001). As was affirmed in the last Report on Territorial Development (*Informe de Desarrollo Territorial*), 'Andalusia continues to harbour one of the greatest concentrations of poverty in the country' (Zoido *et al.,* 2001: 145).

Nevertheless, as I commented earlier, in Andalusia specifically and Spain more generally the demand for education and the level of instruction of the population has improved a great deal in a few years. Of course, the attitudes toward and behaviour of Andalusian families with respect to this area of social life (money expended on education, expectations about children's participation in it, the involvement of the family in schools, etc.) varies noticeably according to social position, cultural capital and the kind of habitat in which the family home is located (Junta de Andalucía, 1999a). For that reason, Andalusia still registers high levels of potential illiteracy in many areas of the region[4] (Zoido *et al*., 2001: 218).

As is only logical, the widespread perception of this socioeconomic trend in family life has conditioned the objectives of socialist reform. The socialists have been encouraged to convert school reform into something that transcends vanguardist pedagogical change. The reforms of the 1990s were also conceived as an ambitious *political* reform (*politicized* according to its critics) that was intended to transform the whole of society (Bonal, 1998). The concept of 'comprehensivity' was to become the fundamental pedagogical instrument of this effort:

> 'Comprehensive instruction aspires to offer the same educational opportunities to all students without regard to social class distinctions and to act as a compensatory mechanism (to combat) the inequalities of economics and social origin' (*Ministerio de Educación*, 1989)

In addition to 'comprehensivity,' the reform would also be guided by three other fundamental intellectual concepts: 'democratization,' 'constructivism,' and 'modernization.' Inspired by these ideas, the socialists put into play a variety of structural changes (Pereyra *et al*, 2001):

– *The period of compulsory instruction was extended by two years to 16 years of age*. This measure represents a significant increase in the comprehensiveness

of the system, at least legally, and it now corresponds to the minimum working age that is determined by Spanish law. This development not only lengthens the period of basic education for all Spaniards, it converts it into a very open social space capable of forging a new kind of citizenry.

– *The selection criteria for admitting students were reduced and integrationist educational measures were implemented*, based on the principal of *attention to diversity*, whatever be its origins: psychobiological, socioeconomic, geographic, or cultural.

– *Educational institutions were democratized,* by which was supposed, among other things, that the Principal (*Director*) would be elected, that the educational community would participate in the administration and the governance of schools, that there would be an increase in functional autonomy and that the rules of participation would be determined by reaching accord among all participants, and do on.

– *An integral reform of vocational education (formación professional*, FP*) would be undertaken with the creation of a new level beyond compulsory education*, parallel to the traditional secondary education (*Bachillerato*) and a superior level paralleling university instruction. They sought to enhance the social prestige of courses of study that in Spain enrolled far fewer students than in the countries of northern and central Europe. Moreover, vocational education would be adapted to the requirements of the productive system, thus improving the likelihood that its graduates would find appropriate employment.

– *A reform of the teaching function was advanced that favoured a change in the role of the teacher, above all the secondary education instructor*. An effort was made to redefine the teacher as a mentor tasked with developing of the personality and civic awareness of the student, rather than as a mechanism for transmitting information. Additionally, the traditional, hierarchical organization of teachers was modified, especially in secondary education.

– *An open and flexible curriculum was established*, with some general features of curriculum (*Diseño Curricular Base*) that the different autonomous communities, the instructional centres, and even each professor, could adapt to the local context by developing particular educational projects and programs.

– *This educational plan contemplated diverse objectives, in which traditional cognitive considerations did not even predominant*. These plans sought to improve the wider social environment of the student in order to promote personal motivation and to facilitate the student's personal and social development. The use of the new electronic technologies was to be encouraged as a pedagogical instrument.

– *Measures of evaluation, fundamentally qualitative in nature, were to be employed* as a system of control and would be applied to a variety of variables,

including the teacher, that were implicated in the educational process. A system of evaluation that was limited to the final results of the learning process was entirely rejected.

– *New modalities of educational counselling were rehearsed by teachers and by experts in psychopedagogy.*

The reform just described was preceded in the 1980s by a period of experimentation that in a few schools that had voluntarily solicited it. These schools, whose teachers in many cases were participants in even earlier pedagogical reform movements, had been granted exceptional human, technical and financial resources and they were subjected to rigorous scrutiny. But the process of effectively implementing this reform only began for the entirety of the system in 1990. One of the first measures put into practice was the extension of the period of compulsory education (and its structural modification), that included for the very first time in Spanish history a portion of secondary education. This inclusive measure delivered a strong jolt to the academic and pedagogic traditions of this particular level of the educational system (Ruiz Berrio, 2001).

The socialist reform created a new educational tier called Compulsory Secondary Education (*Educación Secundaria Obligatoria*, ESO) that spanned the ages of twelve to sixteen. Half of this new level of education used to form part of primary education. Although this new stage of education was now defined as part of secondary education, some of its curricular and organizational features actually remained more typical of the primary school. It did not take long for the secondary teachers to protest against this development (Ruiz Paz, 1999; Esteve, 2000), especially those who were older and enjoyed a certain professional status. This reform 'violated' a classic element of the structure of the educational system: the traditional and sharp division between primary education, which was intended to be general, basic, and for everyone, and secondary instruction, which was not compulsory and was more prestigious, academic and selective.

As could be expected, the reaction among teachers of primary education has been very different The pedagogical changes undertaken were quite consonant with the historical antecedents of primary education: remodelling the classic distribution of the disciplines with interdisciplinary formulas, introducing cross-curricular areas of study (e.g. multiculturalism, gender, environmental education, education for peace, etc.), opening up the secondary schools to all manner of students, including those who were neither motivated nor well prepared for additional study, and other similar innovations. But these same policies clashed with the traditional guidelines of secondary education, whose teacher corps shared a professional *habitus* that was deeply rooted (Perrenoud, 2001) and that presented

a very corporative professional image. In the face of the proposed curricular reforms, they defended, for example, the restoration of the primacy of cognitive objectives of performance and the traditional, instrumental bodies of knowledge (language, mathematics, etc.). Likewise they believed that the disorder and chaos that had taken hold in secondary education was due to having converted it into a massive and excessively heterogeneous phase of the educational cycle. And they were, of course, convinced that the level of preparation of the students had declined to an alarming degree.

To complicate matters further, the socialist reform put together both primary and secondary teachers in the first cycle (i.e., the first two years) of the new compulsory stage of secondary education and they even put them together in the very same schools (IES, Institutes of Secondary Education) and gave them similar professional rights. At least at first, they sought to group together in one single professional category the old teacher corps of secondary teachers that had historically been hierarchialized into administrative categories (e.g. '*Catedrático de Bachillerato*' or Professor of Secondary School) which had a venerable history in the guild-like organization of teachers. The addition of *maestros* (primary teachers), instructors with less academic and social prestige, to the first two years of secondary education could not easily be accepted by the historical segment of its professoriate who sought to defend to the end certain prerogatives. They had already begun to lose some privileges as a consequence of the modernization of the country in the final years of the dictatorship, especially since the rate of matriculation into secondary education had improved noticeably in the 1970s, years before the socialist reforms had been proposed. But, in addition to a widening gap in secondary education, the most important effect of this reform was its radical reorientation of the role of the teacher, a reorientation that collided with some of the key components of the professional culture of the traditional secondary teacher (Viñao, 2002). Ironically, this defensive, and essentially nostalgic, attitude is intensifying precisely at a time when secondary education is enjoying massive demographic growth and when the real difference between the different strata of pre-university Spanish teachers is diminishing in terms of salary, image and social prestige (González Faraco, 2002).

The socialist reform tried to overcome these and other forms of resistance, but they only grew with time. By reorganizing the curriculum in order to adapt it to the diversity of the student body, the importance of the classical areas of knowledge declined in favour of attitudinal and instrumental objectives which were implemented with the goal of constructing a new educational subject, a 'new child' who would be critical and creative, socially responsible and solidaristic. In other words, the goal was a new citizen for a more just, democratic state. This was educational reform's message of social redemption.

In parallel fashion, another intellectual referent of this reform was the quality of 'modernization.' To 'modernize' it was deemed necessary to adapt the school system to the vertiginous dynamism and the sheer complexity of postmodern society, marked as it is by information technology and the swift movement of goods and ideas on a global scale. The ideal student, the citizen with some genuine opportunities in this kind of world, would be one who can handily navigate through a space that is simultaneously virtual, transnational, and fiercely competitive (Brown & Lauder, 1997). This 'modern' image of the 'new citizen' would complement that of the 'socially conscious' image already discussed, but it would also produce a contradiction. Civic values and 'the ideology of competence,' as Pierre Bourdieu (1998) describes it, generally diverge into two quite different educational paths. Of course, this was not the only contradiction besetting the socialist reform, nor would the resistance of professors be the only obstacle that it would encounter along the way. After an initial expansive and enthusiastic stage, Spanish educational reform entered into a period of progressive recession and retreat. To a certain degree, this is also a period marked by illusion and self-deception.

The new student's paradoxical identity: by way of epilogue

This admittedly pessimistic assessment is clearly supported by the interviews we conducted with Andalusian politicians, undertaken just before the end of that cycle (1999-2000). Their discourse assumed a notably quixotic air: educational realities overcame their reformist dreams and giants were quickly transformed into windmills. Curiously (but perhaps not coincidentally), this development reproduces one that Spanish political life suffered generally as the enthusiasm of the transition gave way successively to democracy, to the first socialist victory, and finally to the disenchantment and scepticism that was to follow.

The teachers did not cease grousing about their lost authority while the mass media disseminated images of chaotic classrooms, breakdowns in discipline, and poor test results, especially in secondary schools. The civic-minded, constructivist, autonomous, and cosmopolitan 'ideal student' of the reformers could not have differed more from the passive, apathetic, and maladaptive 'real student' of the media (Pereyra *et al.*, 2001: 301). As is the norm in Spanish political history, the reformers – self-styled as misunderstood dreamers – blamed the failure of their measures on those who were its subjects (Viñao, 2002). In their view, educational reform was well conceived; all of the aforementioned problems were located squarely with those who had the task of actually realizing reform in the schools. They pointed to the resistance of teachers, the unfortunate

characteristics of students, the implacable routines of school culture, and so on and so forth.

Ironically, at the very same time, a genuine longing flourished for the more committed teacher of an earlier era with his equally nostalgic counterpart, the 'old' student who worked harder, was more motivated and more obedient than is the case with the contemporary pupil. A widespread denunciation of the 'excesses' of the politics of diversity and democratization in schools ensued:

> 'There has been an excess of the revolutionary spirit of the France of May 1968 and perhaps this has brought with it a teacher-student egalitarianism that has relaxed their relationship too much', confessed a socialist member of parliament. 'Previously education created guidelines intended to produce acceptance of a social, scientific and religious hierarchy. Today, this is reckoned to be a poor understanding of democracy in the classroom. And, clearly, from this comes all of the tumult,' a leading socialist politician commented to us.'

Only two years after recording these words in 2000, we can read a very similar diagnosis, but emanating from the Popular Party, in the Ministry of Education's new 'Statement of Principles' (*Documento de Bases*, 2002), that serves as a prelude to its own reform:

> '...we cannot turn a blind eye to such realities as the deterioration of a climate of mutual tolerance and cooperative striving in the schools and the classrooms, the declining reputation of the figure of the teacher, the demoralization and malaise of the teachers or the inability of school directors to establish the minimum necessary conditions for the adequate functioning of the school.'

Confronted with this apocalyptic situation, continues the text, 'inescapably, a reform must be imposed.' Some months afterwards, we can read in the preamble of the Proposal for the Law of Educational Quality of 2002:

> 'These are deficiencies that ought to be corrected, because the future of our youth, the aspirations of their families, and the requirements of our economy and society require it.'

For the second time in a decade, political discourse returns to the message of social redemption through education. Now, however, the talismanic term is not

'equity' (*equidad*), but 'quality' (*calidad*) described in terms of effort, competence, merit, opportunities, control and authority, all in the framework of the technological society of the 21st century.

This perfunctory description of some aspects of the reformist cycle in Spanish education in the last decade of the 20th century allows us to verify, among other things, that political discourse about education acquires over time a paradoxical tinge, both concealed and explicit. Thus, the very same people who applaud the wonders of cultural change and technological innovation do not hesitate to indulge in nostalgic representations of the past as a means for recovering lost order by exorcising the chaos that afflicts the educational system. This drift in the rhetoric of the reformist cycle, with this 'double play' reasoning that is so paradoxical, can be observed and described in various aspects of the educational discourse of the present. Let us examine some of them which refer directly to the identity of the 'new student':

(a) Ideas about the knowledge that should be learned in school have been modified and as a result so have notions about what constitutes excellence in the classroom.

In line with modern pedagogy, reformist discourse detests memorization and is inclined, in the word of one of the politicians interviewed, towards 'learning how to live' as the preferred objective of education 'so that the students learn how to confront life, to criticize, to evaluate, to choose, to be free and responsible'. Another interviewee was even more insistent about a similar idea, alluding to 'understanding through scholarly success':

> 'If by scholarly success is meant getting good grades…does this really imply a capacity for comprehension, a reflexive capacity, a critical capacity, or does it mean simply a capacity to memorize as has always been the case?'

But little by little this perspective has been diverted into an 'academic apprenticeship' model, believed to be more competitive in the framework of the contemporary market. The relative failure of some curricular innovations promoted by the reforms seem to have pushed some of our interviewees to reconsider a model that gives pride of place to the branching out of the curriculum and that favours allowing students more choice in the choice of the topics to be studied, while, at the same time, reducing the time spent learning basic bodies of knowledge. For example, a socialist politician highly placed in the educational system, noted the following:

'The average citizen will change occupations between six or five times during the course of his life. He will adapt and acquire the knowledge necessary for a new occupation more easily if his knowledge base is basic and general. I have the feeling that it would be good to reconsider the divisions of the *bachillerato* (post-compulsory secondary education), the great catalogue of different professional titles. Because I do not understand why, if young people must leave the educational system with basic, general knowledge, we are boxing them into courses of study that are so specific.'

Inevitably, in a dual-system like the Spanish one (with historically quite different primary and secondary educational traditions), this produces a significant experiential disjunction. The first experience is of teachers attempting to instruct one how to *learn to live* and is associated with public instruction and its ideal student type. The second 'apprenticeship' seeks to instil academic knowledge (and discipline) and is consonant with private instruction and its own, very different, ideal student type. In recent years, the recovery by the private sector of a greater part of the educational market, that is to say, of the students themselves, has become very significant in Spain (Rambla, 1998). Some believe that prescribing the principle of competence is the medicine necessary to avoid putting public education at a distinct disadvantage with respect to its private counterpart:

'To have public education, the strength of the State, is both good and bad. It is good because it generalizes education and it is bad because often it does not compete...'

Naturally, this principle constitutes a central feature of the texts of the projected reforms of the Popular Party, as I have just argued. Similar ideas are also present in the educational platform of the Republican Party of the United States, as can be regularly observed in the speeches and pronouncements of President Bush.

(b) The production of nostalgic images about the teacher and the student has grown slowly but surely.

As I have noted, the very same people who insisted upon the necessity of educational transformation in a world of accelerated change presume also to quiet the restlessness that this change instils by means of an obsessive quest for reassurance in educational tradition and the personal models of a bygone time.

They laud the restoration of rules of discipline and they question the retention in basic education of disinterested students, who they accuse of being 'educational objectors'. The once almost reverent image of youth has begun to come into question.

> 'Today the problem,' commented one interviewee, 'is that the youth do not accept norms of behaviour, young people have decided to party until dawn and do as they please. Perhaps in earlier generations they were not like that… At the beginning of the democratic era in Spain, the school was modelled on a system of education dedicated to freedom and this produced an educational experience with scarcely any rules, or with very lax rules at best. I believe that we have to evolve towards an educational system with rules.'

The complementarity of these ideas with those expressed in the text of the proposals for the Law of Educational Quality (2002), as part of the new conservative reform, is clear:

> 'The new reformist impulse that this Law promotes is sustained by the conviction that the values of sustained effort and personal commitment constitutes the basic conditions necessary to improve the quality of the educational system, values which have been weakened as to undermine the concepts of duty, discipline, and respect for the teacher.'

Certainly, this is not the first time that education has been conceptualized as a tool for producing order out of social chaos, or, as T. Popkewitz puts it (1998), as a system for the social administration of liberty (see also Hunter, 1998; Viñao, 2002).

(c) An 'essentialist' vision of the educational subject has returned, a vision based on the 'theory of the rotten apple.'

We listened attentively to the following text taken from one of the interviews, specifically one that was conducted with a high official of the socialist educational system during the middle of the nineties, shortly before the electoral victory of the conservatives:

> 'I believe that always there are some students who are difficult and others who are easy to teach. There is no good student or bad

student. The question is: Is it better to separate them or integrate them? This is the great problem. A teacher with whom I was speaking last week told me, 'Look, I believe that the notion of the rotten apple is certainly true, and that if in a class of thirty good students we place two bad ones, they will ruin the entire class.'

The conservative reform outlined in the new Law of Educational Quality (LOCE, 2002) clearly opts for a path that is only insinuated in the words of this socialist politician. In the preamble of the Law one may read the following:

'The educational system seeks to acquire a flexible configuration, that adapts to individual differences in the aptitudes, needs, and rhythms of maturation of the people… The very diversity of the student body counsels for a certain variety of educational trajectories.'

Some authors, such as B. Baker (2000: 163-164), ask if today, at the beginnings of the twenty-first century, we are not returning to a certain 'essentialism' in our conception of childhood, relegating to a secondary plane, or even forgetting altogether, its historical and social context (Rodríguez Pascual, 2002; Hultqvist & Dahlberg, 2001). After decades of predominantly Marxist analysis of the school and of the relations between scholastic success and social context, this turn arrests our attention. In a parallel manner, the social sciences also appear to be ceding territory before the advances of the genetic sciences. Everything indicates that a certain neo-naturalism has retarded political discourse about education in order to clarify and guide the variegating course of educational differences. The effort to 'mainstream' those students with learning difficulties is a noble proposition and a beautiful theory of pedagogy that clashes with the inevitability of human differences. As one socialist politician involved with the administration of Andalusian education affirms:

'This is an impeccable discourse that is not debatable. What was unexpected is that in practice it is disputed... We have begun to have students in the system who do not want to study but they are in the system and this produces problems. We have to give them special help and everyone has to dedicate special effort for them and this produces distortions that are difficult to accept.'

Another interviewee is even more trenchant:

'...society will not function and the educational institutions are impotent in the face of the social problems that this is producing.'

Perhaps, this recognition of the great distance between the desired state of affairs and the current reality can serve as justification for the failure and weaknesses of the egalitarian politics undertaken by the socialist reform, but it is more important that it demonstrates an absolute divergence form the utopian thought that serves as the foundation for contemporary socialist movements and, as a result, of the reformist pedagogical tendencies that, to a certain extent, have been inspired by them. We are left, then, to sketch out a contradictory discourse that simultaneously calls for a civic and inclusive institution that is also an efficient and productive school, from which new generations of our electronic society depart well-prepared for combat in the battlefield of the global market. These comments, rather than serve as conclusions, perhaps will cause us to ask new questions: Are we confronted with a simple unprincipled accommodation of reformist theory to economic facts? Are we left, instead, to note the conservatizing effects of time on the principal agents of educational politics, who are both aging and coming to enjoy too much the luxuries of power? Are we observing yet another example of the decline of ideology, of the end of egalitarian utopias, of the deteriorating ideology of the left and its convergence with more conservative elements? Does this situation represent, on the other hand, a real demonstration of the hybrid political model that the sociologist A. Giddens baptized as 'the third way'? Can it be that in this era of globalization we are installing among ourselves a singular and monolithic educational discourse that presumes to have struck the perfect balance between productive efficacy and systemic equity? Are we not witnessing, at last, the death of the educational utopia of modernity?

Notes

1. University of Helsinki (Finland); University of Iceland; University of Uppsala (Sweden); University of Keele (Scotland); J.W. Goethe University (Frankfurt, Germany); University College of Westhill (Birmingham, Great Britain); University of Lisbon (Portugal); University of Athens (Greece); University of Granada (Spain). The chairman of the Spanish research team was Dr. Miguel A. Pereyra, University of Granada.

2. G. Bateson (1958: 175) defines the expression 'schismogenesis' as 'a process of differentiation in the norms of individual behaviour resulting from cumulative interaction between individuals.' He refers to the *progressive differentiation* that can characterize the behaviour of two persons or social entities, as one responds to the intervention of the other with a reaction that is similar or somewhat more intense. A good and, in the context of this article, relevant example would be a dispute between children that breaks out in the playground of a school: the shove of the first child provokes another shove, a bit stronger than the first, a behavioural cycle which ultimately results in a full

scale fight. To appreciate fully the anthropological impact of 'schismogenesis' one should refer to the excellent work of Charles W. Nuckolls, *The Cultural Dialectics of Knowledge and Desire*. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1996, pp. 49-78.

3.   In Spain this rate has reached truly alarming rates, for today it is one of the lowest in the world. This fall in birth rate is very patent in the evolution of the student population. In the last ten years (1991-2001), despite a notable increase in the number of university students and the sustained growth in pre-school education, the total number of students inscribed in the educational system has declined by more than one million (from 9,400,000 students to 8,300,000) (CIDE, 2002: 99-100) The demographic recuperation of Spain (with approximately 41 million inhabitants) detected in the last census is due above all to immigration, whose volume has been increasingly rapidly in recent years.

4.   *Potential illiteracy* refers to the percentage of people older than ten years old, with respect to the total number of people in this age group, who cannot read or write or who have not completed compulsory primary schooling. In Andalusia, despite the great advances that have occurred in education in recent decades, fully a third of the population is potentially illiterate.

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