

## 15 Marketing academic issues: to what extent does education policy steer education research in Spain?

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The final and reviewed version of this paper was published in Jenny Ozga, Tom Popkewitz and Terri Seddon (dir) (2006) *World Yearbook of Education 2006: Education Research and Policy*. Oxon (UK): Routledge, pp. 246-258.

### INTRODUCTION

In Spain the two recent more significant and controversial education reforms were passed in 1990 and 2002. The former implemented a comprehensive education system and shifted school leaving age from fourteen to sixteen years. The foreword of that Education Reform Act argued that ‘our modernising society’ had to respond to more open individual, political, cultural and productive spaces by means of more extended education and pedagogic innovation that aimed to make educational quality sure (LOGSE - *Ley Orgánica de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo*, i.e. Organic Act on the General Framework the Educational System-, 1/1990, October 3st). Some scholars, who collaborated actively to design that reform, declared that comprehensive secondary education was a common feature of European countries (Coll 1999: 21). The latter implemented tracking for fourteen- year- old students, because ‘quality education is the obliged response to the world where we already are’ (MECD 2002a), and ‘the whole integration of Spain into the European Union requires a higher degree of standardisation and flexibility of the educational system’ (LOCE - *Ley Orgánica de*

*Calidad Educativa*, i.e. Framework Act on Educational Quality-, 10/2002, December 23<sup>rd</sup>). Other scholars collaborated to design it asserting that comprehensive secondary education had eventually to implement tracking. In their view, a parallel shift could be observed towards tracking throughout the European Union (Prada 2002: 39).

Thus, for the last fifteen years academic and official discourses have converged to defend opposite policy choices based in alleged empirical generalisations grounded on analogous but contradictory comparisons of European systems. Regardless of their validity, the logic of their arguments provides one of the most visible signs that education has been linked to democracy, modernisation and Europeanisation by most Spanish policy-makers, researchers, and broadly speaking, citizens. Unsurprisingly, they have stretched their contentions on what education should be to all these twin notions. The implicit general assumption is that Spain has just become a modern country thanks to several social changes such as these very reforms.

International comparison is a key issue if we are to discuss the influence of the global agenda of education policy on education research in this country. For a long time both policy goals and research priorities have been embedded in the very debate on their coincidence with wider trends. Spanish intellectuals, policy-makers and most people considered that they were not modern enough and had to imitate 'European' institutions, political and economic practices in order to achieve progress. This very image legitimated the reform fifteen years ago. Nowadays the same assumptions hinder their own repetition, since many people conclude that the desired modernisation or Europeanisation has already taken place, but they have become very powerful rhetoric

instruments nonetheless. Anybody who can blame somebody else to be traditional or old-fashioned has an advantage in political discussion. Similarly, the supporters of the last reform argued that they were not only overhauling the education system but also aligning its structure to European patterns.

If we frame this process within the current global agenda, it is necessary to ask whether there has been a connection. Roughly speaking, this modernisation agenda includes the World Bank conditioned loans, the UN Millennium Development Goals, the WTO negotiations on educational services or the EU Lisbon Declaration. Have these issues influenced the debates and analyses of policy changes in Spain? Although this is too broad a question for this article, it can suggest very tentatively a partial answer to one of its key implications. The global agenda has been presented as a coherent conclusion of academic research programs on human capital, social capital, market governance, performance-based school organisation, quality and so on. So have education policy changes also responded to similar links between the academy and politics in Spain? In other countries some authors have suggested that these links may have created new mechanisms of research steering via an active promotion of certain research issues, such as research problems related to pedagogical practice (Shain & Ozga 2001) or the so called school effects on performance (Poupeau 2003).

As to Spain, I will try to spell out some empirical indicators of a similar mechanism, focusing on the relationship between the points of view expressed in the recent debate on educational quality and the background coming from academic research on educational policy in the country. My point is that a sort of marketing strategy can be

identified that favours ‘quality’ as a significant political and academic issue. Thus, a global concern has eventually rooted in the debate at the Spanish scale. However, contrary to France and Britain, the steering mechanism has not impinged on research production but on academic rhetoric. The fact that educational research, and consequently, research on educational policy, has a weak tradition can certainly help to explain this mechanism.

The article is divided into four parts. The first one sketches an historical overview, and the second one describes policy and research mechanisms. The third part provides a more detailed analysis of the debate on the 2002 Educational Quality Act. Finally, the fourth concludes that educational research steering is a kind of ‘globalism’ that the parties of this contention have eventually ‘localised’ in the Spanish academy and politics.

### **EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND RESEARCH: AN HISTORIC OVERVIEW**

In 1970 an authoritarian government reformed the whole Spanish education system for the first time for nearly 100 years. Since the early and frail Liberal constitutions in the nineteenth century, universal primary schooling had been proclaimed but never implemented. In the short Republican period between 1931 and 1939 the also frail Left-wing governments could only implement some short initiatives to build new schools (1931-3) or universalise a comprehensive system (in Catalonia for the 1936-7 and 1937-8 school years). The winners of the Civil War did not show any interest in going on with

educational expansion, even though the nationalisation of the whole country became their open objective so as to reinforce Spanish nationalism in front of Basque, Catalan and Galician nationalist clandestine forces. Afterwards, the Franco regime was accepted by the United States, and adopted a renewed economic policy that integrated the economy into the Western long-term cycle of growth.

In 1962 the World Bank issued its first report including specific recommendations for the Spanish government, administrative reform being one of them. In fact, the 1970 education reform was the first act that was prepared on the basis of a White Book written by technically competent staff. Its measures foresaw the extension of a new co-educational and compulsory education from 11 year-olds to 14 year-olds, and the creation of University-based Institutes of Education that were in charge of in-service training (Mayordomo 1999). However, these proposals were severely curtailed in the first years of implementation, and the main operational measure was merely restricted to subsidising private schools in order to universalise primary schooling. As a consequence, the school system was unable to supply places for all the children who were born during the 1960-77 demographic boom, and came close to collapse before the political transition that took place between 1978 and 1982 (Calero & Bonal 1999).

Between 1978 and 1985 many new schools were finally built, thanks to the increasing revenues that tax reform had provided to the state. Since the 1978 Constitution had also stated that education was a social right, the following governments had to design the framework acts that would define the new education system. After the defeat of the Centrist party in 1982, the Socialist party passed three foundational acts. It regulated

participation and the criteria to fund private schools in 1985, the whole curriculum with the mentioned comprehensive orientation in 1990, as well as evaluation and organisation in 1995. The 1990 education reform act has become the 'reform' for most teachers and families, since it included such a visible and controversial change as the integration of the former academic and vocational secondary schools. Although it explicitly required higher educational expenditure, this condition was not fully met.

When it won the 1996 election, the Conservative party became ultimately responsible for the 'reform'. However, implementation neither relied on comprehensive principles nor was concerned with higher expenditure but financial conservatism. For its first period in office the Conservative party simply issued a broad diagnosis and hinted at its intention to specify a detailed syllabus for the Humanities curriculum, but did not pass substantial legal changes. At that time the official Institute for Educational Quality, led by a prestigious scholar, actively disseminated the thesis that schools needed organisational changes to overcome some alleged shortcomings with respect to quality. After winning the 2000 election with an absolute majority, the Conservative government designed and passed the 2002 Quality Act, which opened up an intense debate between scholars and teachers. Generally speaking, its explicit philosophy was identifying quality with the 'culture of endeavour'. Its articles allowed the extension of public subsidies to private schools that supplied infant education, transformed Religion into an academic subject, introduced performance- based tracking for the fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds in the two last compulsory courses, and established a final examination at the end of academic upper secondary education. Three years later, at the moment of writing (March 2005), the Socialist government has been in office for one

year, has already delayed some of these measures and promised an alternative legislative development.

### **STEERING EDUCATION POLICY AND RESEARCH (1996- 2004)**

Two processes took place during the Conservative 1996-2004 period that contextualised the debate on quality in 2002. Firstly, educational policy highlighted this concept of quality at the same time as it cut educational expenditure down. Simultaneously, the education system was fully de-centralised and some Autonomous Communities also implemented new compensatory devices. Secondly, like educational research, studies on educational policy showed weak institutionalisation, although its academic corpus continued to widen at a slow but persistent pace.

Between 1996 and 2000 the National Institute for Educational Quality (INCE) was reinforced within the Ministry, and José Luis García Garrido, a professor in educational science, was appointed as its director. The 1990 Act had created this institute and commissioned it to monitor and evaluate the educational system. Mostly, it produced standard examinations and many surveys of students', teachers' and parents' opinions about schools. In 1998 INCE issued a general report pointing towards a synthesis of findings and recommendations (INCE 1998). At the same time, the Ministry tried to apply the European Model for the Management of Quality (EMMQ) by means of a Yearly Improvement Plan which was explicitly deployed so that 'objective' innovation and monitoring counteracted the alleged perverse effects of child-centred pedagogies (López Rupérez 1998: 18). Paradoxically, although the EMMQ based quality

management on self-monitoring, it was assumed that it could only be adopted by schools formerly exhibiting a sound culture of evaluation (López Rupérez 1998: 22). In fact, the new policy could easily play down the 1990 Act on pedagogic autonomy and curriculum development by requiring the creation of an evaluation system. Thus, official research became a very effective tool for introducing alternative issues and recommendations.

A few comments help to portray the context of that debate. On the one hand, Calero & Bonal (2004) have convincingly showed that educational expenditure never met the threshold that the 1990 act foresaw and, even worse, that its volume stagnated in the late nineties. As a consequence, the rhetorical emphasis on educational quality led to persistent practical shortcomings in the last judgement. On the other hand, the Ministry of Education was no longer in charge of compensatory education (Jiménez 2003). When the central government passed the Quality Act in 2002, compensatory programs as well as the bulk of educational responsibilities had become the responsibilities of regional governments or Autonomous Communities since 2000. However, the Act evoked the UNESCO *Education For All* program, and took account on the parallel concern with universal quality education, proclaiming that its aim was ‘quality education for all’.

The original program of compensatory education had been designed in the eighties. It operated through specialised teachers who supplied complementary support to low performing children. So far the Autonomous Communities have extended this sort of operations in several ways. Some of them have responded to the complaints of parents’ associations by subsidising student textbooks according to different criteria (Jiménez



2003). Others have also implemented general plans so that compensatory initiatives can be co-ordinated between primary and secondary schools or between the Community and municipalities (Dirección General de Promoción Educativa de la Comunidad de Madrid 2001). Other plans have opened spaces for the participation of NGOs and immigrant minorities (Consejería de Educación de la Junta de Andalucía 2001); in Catalonia, several local authorities have launched local educational projects so as to broaden participation, improve co-ordination and share educational responsibilities with the Autonomous Community (Jaumeandreu & Badosa 2002). A pedagogic participatory initiative inspired by accelerated schools, the so called 'learning communities', has been experimented with in Aragón, the Basque Country and Catalonia (Comunidades de Aprendizaje 2005). Finally, the Basque Government has also expanded the minimal complementary grants system in order to reinforce post-compulsory enrolment (Calero & Bonal 2004).

This description of the Quality Act policy context has to take account of a last element, namely educational social cohesion. Here, I will only provide a short report based on EUROSTAT data on early school leavers. As table 15.1 displays, since the mid nineties this indicator remained stable at 30% of 18-24 year-olds with at most lower secondary education and not in further education or training. The gap with the EU 15 average has widened, because this average is lower and has experienced a visible reduction. The distance between the Spanish and the EU score was 145 in 1996, but had grown beyond 165 in 2003.

TABLE 15.1 ABOUT HERE

Another relevant context of the Quality Act has been the very research system, to be precise, the weak institutionalisation of education research and specifically research on education policy. Since most researchers are University lecturers and professors, their work is funded by the Spanish research and development plan, by some non-profit foundations or by specific agreements with certain departments. An important part of these research contributions is provided through PhD dissertations or simply the individual work of scholars. In the near future some changes could take place due to introduction of new types of contracts for academic staff in Spanish universities. These contracts require a higher profile of research activities and publications that might bring about some changes, but it is not sensible to guess their likely effect right now. Many of the first research evaluation schemes have privileged Anglo-Saxon journals and only included Spanish and Latin American ones in very marginal positions. As a consequence, the excellence standards might become almost impossible for many researchers, since they might simply disregard them. I insist that this point is such a mere conjecture that cannot provide relevant clues yet.

However, some other pieces of evidence suggest that educational research has not achieved a strong position within the Spanish research system. An overview of its role in the main institutional structures reveals that it is considered as a marginal area of knowledge. Three observations support this contention:

- To start with, there is no reference either to educational research nor to any sort of close social research in the priorities of the *Plan Nacional de Investigación Científica, Desarrollo e Innovación Tecnológica 2004-07* (National Plan of

Scientific Research, Development and Technological Innovation 2004-07) (MEC 2004). It is not even directly mentioned in the main areas of knowledge but listed within the sub-areas of 'social and economic science'. The other main areas are: life sciences; natural resources, food and environmental technology; space sciences; mathematics and physics; energy; chemistry; materials; industrial design and production; security and defence; information and communication technology; transport and building; and humanities.

- As to research institutes, the *Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas* (High Council for Scientific Research) presents 122 research units in its website (see [www.csic.es](http://www.csic.es)). None of them includes educational research in its title.
- The two single educational research institutes directly supported by public funding are not directly scientific units. These are the CIDE *Centro de Investigaciones y Documentación Educativa* (Centre for Educational Research and Documentation) and the INECSE *Instituto Nacional de Evaluación y Calidad del Sistema Educativo* (National Institute of Evaluation and Quality of the Educational System, the former INCE redefined by the 2002 LOCE) (see [www.mec.es](http://www.mec.es)). Both of them are departments within the Ministry of Education. Even though CIDE funded some projects years ago, its catalogue only reports very few recent projects. INECSE and the former INCE have played a crucial role in the whole debate on quality, as has already been said and will be developed further in the next section.

While there were neither institutes nor specific funds for academic educational research, in 2002, INCE had been surveying public opinion about schools and actively disseminating its results since the mid nineties. These data have impinged on the state of

the art of this weak specialty, where most alternative research was conducted by individual scholars or small groups.

This is not to deny that educational research has improved in Spain. Full elaboration of this point is beyond the scope of this article, but two final observations indicate that it has become more institutionalised than in the past. Firstly, several academic associations gather experts on recent education policy in Spain, at least in the areas of comparative education (SEEC- *Sociedad Española de Educación Comparada*, [www.sc.ehu.es/sfwseec](http://www.sc.ehu.es/sfwseec)), economics of education (AEDE- *Asociación de Economía de la Educación*, [www.pagina-aede.org](http://www.pagina-aede.org)), pedagogy (SEP- *Sociedad Española de Pedagogía*, [www.uv.es/soespe](http://www.uv.es/soespe)), and sociology of education (ASE-*Asociación de Sociología de la Educación*, [www.ase.es](http://www.ase.es)). Secondly, for a long time many professional journals have been published for a broad audience but it is now possible to identify a set of academic journals where education policy is a common issue. A short and varied selection should include the following titles at least: *Bordón. Revista Española de Pedagogía* (Spanish Society of Pedagogy), *Educar* (Autonomous University of Barcelona), *Revista de Educación* (Ministry of Education), *Revista Española de Educación Comparada* (Spanish Society of Comparative Education), and *Temps d'Educació* (University of Barcelona).

## **EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND THE DEBATE ON THE 2002 EDUCATIONAL QUALITY ACT**

The 2002 Educational Quality Act has been widely discussed by the academy and the educational community. Several journal numbers and conferences have been devoted to this issue for the last five years. In 2000 *Papeles de Economía Española* published a monograph about the linkages between educational quality and economic growth. In 2002 the former director of INCE José Luis García Garrido edited another monograph of the *Revista de Educación*, in which most articles were in favour of the proposed reform, and also Marchesi & Martín (2002) wrote a report on secondary education expressing alternative views. The Pedagogical society (SEP) opened a debate in its website, and the Sociological Society (ASE) focused its annual meeting on the new Act. Finally, in 2003, *Revista de Educación* published another number on education policy, including Marchesi's and other opinions that were critical of the position of most contributors in the former year.

Many educationalists and other educational specialists also signed the Jabalquinto Declaration in favour of comprehensive and public education in 2002 (Foro de Jabalquinto 2002). Although they have only entered the debate after the Conservatives had lost the 2004 election, two more initiatives should be mentioned as a natural outcome of this collective concern. Between 2002 and 2003 *Fundació Jaume Bofill* gathered national and some international specialists and actors in the Catalan education policy network in order to produce a set of recommendations on equal opportunities (Bonal, Essomba & Ferrer 2004). Finally, between 2003 and 2005 the *Fòrum Social per l'Educació a Catalunya* (Social Forum for Education in Catalonia [www.forumeducacio.org](http://www.forumeducacio.org)) was organised, and finally held in February 2005. Its assistants were mostly Catalan educators, activists and associations, but also some Latin

American and European participants. Its program discussed globalisation, the concept of education, the importance of public schooling and social education.

In this third part of the article I want to analyse the main arguments that were presented for and against the reform in the 2002 and 2003 academic debates. My goal is to document the research background on education policy for these debates, and to estimate the impact of INCE research on the intellectual and ideological interaction that followed both within and outside universities. Thus, the following paragraphs consist of a summary sketch of arguments presented by both sides and a partial conclusion about their connection with policy research findings.

The two main arguments for an 'Educational Quality Act' claimed for the need to bridge crucial gaps and promote the culture of endeavour.

- García Garrido (2000, 2002) asserted that he did not elaborate the Act, since he had left the government by 2000, but supported some of its tenets on the grounds that these reforms eventually put the Spanish system in the mainstream of effective education policy. Essentially, he argued that the Education Quality Act was inspired by an international consensus stating that secondary education needs some sort of tracking. He extended his point on international homologies to another measure concerning school organisation, namely external appointment of head-teachers as in most European countries. Like the Sociologist González Anleo (2002), he argued that the Act was necessary because of the low educational performance of Spanish schools. As evidence, they quoted some surveys (mostly, INCE work), OECD

Education at a Glance and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement.

- The term ‘culture of endeavour’ came to summarise the main criticism that comprehensive education had received due to its alleged contradiction with academic standards. In 2001 INCE had already published a qualified assessment of child-centred and content-centred pedagogies based on a survey of primary education co-ordinators’ views. The report stated that meaningful and active practices (like methodological variation, curriculum individualised adaptation or using newspapers in the classroom) could be helpful to improve performance, but other significant positive correlates required a more directed orientation (eg, a clear sequence of content, teachers’ appraisal, a constant relation between teaching and the textbook and written examinations). Interestingly, it also pointed out that public schools used these more efficient strategies less frequently than private schools (INCE 2001). The White Paper (MECD 2002) outlined a notion of quality that highlighted endeavour, assessment and teacher authority, and the Act assumed it as a principle of quality. In the latter debates several contributors supported the ‘culture of endeavour’ as the basis of their own teaching experience (Vinuesa 2002), their own expertise (Gervilla 2002), international literature on leadership (García Ramos 2002) or previous research on gifted students (Jiménez 2002).

Thus, besides other normative or ideological reasons, the two main arguments for the reform drew on national and international statistics, the comparative method and selected pieces of research on leadership and gifted students.

The Educational Quality Act received two main objections that attacked its alleged ideology and expressed concern with its possible effect on educational inequalities.

- Many educationalists and sociologists blamed the Act for its neoliberal and neoconservative tenets. In a very general sense, Torres (2001) had already advanced this criticism against de-regulation and de-centralisation policies, and proposed that teachers became activists. Martínez Bonafé (2002) made a similar point by spelling out the political side of textbooks. Beltrán (2002), Guerrero (2002) and Fernández Palomares (2002) also explored and criticised the neoliberal assumptions of the Act. Martínez Celorrio (2003) tried to specify what manifestations of a change in governance were visible in the Spanish Conservative project. In sum, these authors used interpretive procedures to read the implicit meanings of the act.
- Another type of critiques focused on the structural dimensions of educational problems. Many of them challenged the Ministry's assumption that international research had observed the failure of comprehensive pedagogy. On the one hand, several scholars argued that LOCE threatened to exacerbate inequality and constrain participation (Ballester *et al.* 2002, Fernández Enguita 2002, Hernández Doblón 2003, Santana *et al.* 2003, Sevilla 2003). On the other hand, Gimeno (2002), Bonal (2003) and Marchesi (2003) pointed out the powerful influence of a low educational level on the academic results in a country like Spain. Marchesi's was a poignant article because it argued that OECD PISA findings didn't allow the conclusion that comprehensive education was responsible for Spain low scores. In fact, the



incumbent Conservative government had argued that the reform was a necessary response to this alleged perverse effect of comprehensive schooling. Even more, it had refused to publish the 2000 PISA report, which found out that early selection is a good predictor of low scores and high inequalities (OECD-UNESCO 2003). Similarly, several educationalists and economists argued that educational expenditure also impinges on results, and the amount of funding was low in Spain (Marchesi 2000, San Segundo 2001, Calero & Bonal 2004).

Thus, critics used interpretive procedures, the comparative method and statistical data in order to challenge the official thesis that the Quality Act was an objective necessity.

In summary, the research background of the 2002 contention on quality was mostly statistical information. García Garrido (2000, 2002), Gimeno (2002) and Marchesi (2003) also used comparative analyses to underpin their points. Interpretive procedures were particularly useful for critics, and some pieces of educational research on comprehensive pedagogy, gifted students and leadership were helpful for supporters. This balance shows that INCE work was crucial not only because it supplied the bulk of the salient evidence, but also because it had become the main research effort over the period in the country.

## **CONCLUSION: A LOCALISED GLOBALISM**

For the 1996- 2004 period, a political and academic contention has taken place on educational quality, an issue included in the global agenda. Other authors have argued that similar movements can be seen in Britain and France, where academic research on educational power and inequalities has been under attack due to its alleged distance from practical implications (Shain & Ozga 2001, Poupeau 2003). Their common conclusions depict the emergence of a new regulation of educational research that operates at the state level. I will conclude my article by comparing these findings to my tentative interpretation of that controversy, and will add a more general reflection on this sort of regulation highlighting its influence at several spatial scales.

To what extent does education policy steer education research in Spain? By 2000 the supporters of the Quality Act had a big advantage within the academic field. After CIDE had reduced its funding a few years before, educational research was weaker than it used to be, and INCE had produced a huge quantitative diagnosis of the problems they claimed to solve. PISA 2000 findings could have eroded their position, but it was not difficult to limit their entry to public knowledge. Their control of *Revista de Educación* allowed them to establish the sequence of publication so that the favourable articles appeared at the same time as the Act was passed, and the critical volumes came out one year after the public discussion. They impinged on the academic debate regardless of the previous corpus of international literature on the structural factors of school performance. They didn't even need to emphasize school effectiveness to present their ideas as the new modern solution. In short, their information management and marketing strategy easily introduced quality into the main academic journals at the appropriate moment.

Like in Britain and France, educational policy-makers seem to have looked for (and found) new regulation mechanisms to steer educational research according to their interests. However, contrary to these other countries, in Spain they needn't attack a previous critical research tradition, but only keep funding low and present their proposal to the academy. Although the reaction was intense in certain areas, INCE surveys were enough to meet the standards of scientific journals.

Interestingly, globalisation studies suggest a further conclusion with respect to contentious rescaling processes. Since the late nineties some authors have argued that a crucial feature of globalisation entails the movements and mismatches of political conflicts between local, national and global scales (Jenson & Santos 2000; Jessop 2001). They have convincingly shown the new regulation procedures that are implemented at different scales where several issues are dealt with. The steering of educational research, or in a more precise sense, of research on education policy, can certainly be one of these crucial policy issues that are objects of new regulation. These authors have also seen the opportunities that rescaling can open at certain moments. The campaign for educational quality in the Spanish academy provides a significant example of both complex multi-scalar regulation and complex multi-scalar opportunities.

As to regulation, it is easy to observe that action at the state level had to be isolated from both lower and higher scales in order to be successful. On the one hand, even though the official and the favourable academic discourses repeated many international comparisons, eventually they had to omit a crucial report issued by an international

organism such as the OECD. On the other hand, even though they claimed their concern with quality education for all, they also had to overlook the development of compensatory initiatives launched by Autonomous Communities. The regional education systems maybe did not present such visible institutional differences as in other countries like the United Kingdom or Belgium, but they had started to experiment with more participatory, universalistic and operational devices than the culture of endeavour in Andalusia, Aragón, the Basque Country and Catalonia.

As to opportunities, once again it should be remembered that some fora emerged where national and international scholars, activists, teachers, parent associations and other civil society actors gathered. At least, we can think of the two Jabalquinto Declarations (the second one was issued by Foro de Jabalquinto 2004), the seminars at the *Fundació Jaume Bofill* in Barcelona and the Social Forum for Education in Catalonia. Will these meetings be able to influence future debates? Will they make use of the complex relationships between the scales of education policy? These are open questions and opportunities.

I have borrowed B.S. Santos' expression 'localised globalism' in order to summarise the main ideas of my article. Global trends reflect a widening interest in steering educational research in the direction of the global agenda of educational policy. Since this agenda is controversial, its derived guidelines for research are conflictive too. Such conflict can pattern the ways in which the policy agenda and research steering take roots in a country. Several endogenous factors, such as the symbolic importance of comparative statements, the sequence of comprehensive reform and the institutional

weakness of educational research, intermingled with these external factors to produce the final outcome of the debate on educational quality in 2002.

Following Santos, the widespread tension between regulation and emancipation in education policy should be remembered. First, some interest groups managed to impose their reform drawing on institutional rules that eventually constrained the space of open debate. They could follow an academic and political strategy driven by immediate objectives, and expressed in a vague neologism (namely, the culture of endeavour) and a rough comparison between the education system and alleged international trends, because they did not face a stronger and more resourceful academic educational research. They needn't even draw on literature about school effectiveness, or have to blame scholarly production for impractical conclusions. But second, their strategy raised such contestation that it opened the possibility of engaging teachers, political parties, educational representative associations and specialists in an open discussion.

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