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Guidelines for an educational agreement policy in Spain

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Abstract

The increase of the social concern for educative results with international comparison of the National Educational Systems performance has had an effect of the mediate diffusion of PISA reports among OCDE country members. In some of them, the poor global results obtained has shocked the public opinion that has started to look for political responsibilities of what is perceived as a progressive deterioration of the Educational System quality. This is what has happened in Spain where the publication of these reports has coincide with the diffusion of other comparative analysis of educational indicators among the 27 members of the European Union. Because of this there are voices strongly claiming for a large State Agreement on Educational Policy among the big parliamentary forces, social agents(unions and business men) and the different sectors of the educational community (managers, teaching staff, families and students), to strengthen education and improve its results.

Key Words

Educational policy, Comparative education, Quality in education

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Introduction

The increase of the social concern for educative results in terms of international comparison of the National Educational Systems performance has had an effect of the mediate diffusion of PISA reports among OCDE country members. In some of them, the poor global results obtained has shocked the public opinion that has started to look for political responsibilities of what is perceived as a progressive deterioration of the Educational System quality. This is what has happened in Spain where the publication of these reports has coincide with the diffusion of other comparative analysis of educational indicators among the 27 members of the European Union. Because of this there are voices strongly claiming for a large State Agreement on Educational Policy among the big parliamentary forces, social agents (unions and business men) and the different sectors of the educational community (managers, teaching staff, families and students), to strengthen education and improve its results.

We want to emphasize in the real need of an Educational agreement in Spain so we propose some guidelines that could support and make possible to achieve that agreement and we also diffuse these ideas to exemplify the importance of the mediate effect of making public these comparative reports about the quality of the educational Systems.

Starting from the study of the educational policy agenda of the European Union and the European Framework of Reference for Education, to enter into a detailed exhibition and the justification of the content that should vertebrate the Educational Agreement in relation to eleven essential topics in education: normative stability; increase of the expenses in education; social and territorial cohesion and municipal implication; institutional autonomy; quality and equity; adult education and continuous training; educational dignity; evaluation of the system and social commitment; and the education of citizens committed with constitutional values.

Supporting the main lines that can sustain an Educational Agreement in the whole State has encouraged us to carry out a brief historical review of the educational policies applied in Spain since the advent of the democracy, gathering along with these laws, economic data and specially, the voices of the professionals of education, as well as of the groups of singular educational sensibility and of the society as a whole which have been manifesting on the different aspects dealt with here and on the need to achieve this important agreement.

The justification for most of these many matters is supported on the information and numbers that offer an international comparative vision of the situation of Spain in the group of the European Union to which our country joins in 1986 and of the Organization for the Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to which Spain belongs since its foundation in 1961. We have simplified the raw data offered by the primary sources to make them more comprehensive. We have used some numbers provided by the Ministry of Education, by the State School Council in its last annual report, by Eurostat (European Communities Statistics Office), in its wide compared report of 2003 on education, by the annual reports of the OECD and by Eurydice. These numbers represent the state of art in different dates within the last five years and some of them include series of the whole decade. It turns out impossible to have all the updated information, in comparative terms and closed up to 2008, nonetheless, the trends can be appreciated in such a clear way that the interpretations we make of the information are fully in force and serve to argue in a suitable way the improvement need of the Spanish Educational System in diverse indicators. We have organized the consulted raw data in tables of similar structure focusing the comparison, mainly, among the 27 current states of the European Union and the average punctuations of the European Union to the 27 states and to the 15 states (previously to the last extension) that represents better the aims on which Spain must converge, as well as to the average punctuations of the OECD. We exclude, expressly, the information of countries of future incorporation to the EU, associated members, countries of the EFTA and the rest of countries of the OECD, no matter how representative they could be to harmonize the comparison. The extension of some of the information offered here is available in Fernandez Cruz (2008).

Along with the description of the current situation of non university education in Spain, we include agreement proposals on which there might converge a great part of the Spanish society headed, necessarily, by its political parties. Each proposal is stated wide enough so it can be submitted to consensus and, simultaneously, with the necessary precision so that it would allow to focus on the improvement of the Educational System in the following years. Though some of the proposals made here can provoke immediate improvement, we are conscious that educational improvement cannot be perceived in a 4 years legislature, that is a very short time. However in four years the different evaluation indicators would inform us about the tendencies and trends of the Educational System. It will take a decade to see the majority of the advances and the effects of a quality education in the economic and social configuration of the state.

1. The educational policy agenda of the European Union as a reference.

The European Council of Lisbon 2000 marked the strategic aim to turn the economy of the European Union into the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy of the world, before 2010, capable of a lasting economic growth accompanied by a quantitative and qualitative improvement of the employment and a greater social cohesion. The European Council to obtain the above mentioned aim, among other matters, had to establish a global strategy to modernize the social European model by means of the investment in human capital and the fight against the social exclusion. That is to improve the educational and training systems of the member countries. In fact the Council admitted that: *" European systems of education and training need to adapt both to the demands of the knowledge society and to the need to improve the level and quality of the employment. They will have to offer learning and training opportunities adapted to target groups in different stages of their lives: young men and women, employed and unemployed adult people at risk of seeing their qualifications exceeded by a fast process of change. This new statement should consist of three principal components: the creation of local learning centers, the promotion of new basic competences, especially on information technologies, and the increasing transparency of qualifications"*.

With this mission, there have been six axes on which public policies of education have advanced and continue advancing since 2000 (in an undoubtedly unequal way in each of the European countries): (1) The achievement of new basic qualifications for all the citizens; (2) More investment in human resources; (3) Innovation in teaching/learning methods; (4) A more appropriate system of valuation of successful learning; (5) The redefinition of the services and programs of guidance and counseling; (6) And, the approximation of the learning to the homes and to the geographical and social context of the apprentice.

The public educational policy agenda of the EU is articulated to these six goals for the achievement of a general purpose of supreme importance: the construction of the Knowledge Society. Once accepted the depletion of the economic and social growth systems based mainly in the investment of the economic capital for the utilization of natural resources, the most developed nations have come to the conviction that the best investment they can make for their economic and social development, is the investment in education and training of their human resources building the knowledge society in which creation, innovation and transference become the real keys of the social development.

Unfortunately we have to admit that all the information available tells us that not only we have not advanced in the line of convergence, but that in indicators so relevant as educational expenses or level of school failure, the situation of Spain has deteriorated in this period. It is out of question that without our committed contest and effort it will be difficult to revert the present situation.

2. Towards regulation stability

An educational agreement of State cannot be reached without regulation stability and the consequent perception of safety that it generates in the different social agents. Education, as we have indicated already, is essential for the development of a knowledge-based society in which the economy of the European countries soon will be based on. Citizen's life quality, social cohesion and even economy competitiveness will depend on it.

The path of the Organic Laws that have regulated education in Spain during the last thirty years has been too wide to achieve three goals to which the juridical - political structure of an Educational System cannot resign: that teaching staff understands in a clear way which are the functions the legislators grant them, i.e., what their mission is in the school beyond the vision inherited from the instructive function linked to a subject; that the own society, whom the legislators represent, manages to know the structure and the school procedures that every new Law introduces to support and to cooperate, in a personal and collective way, with the philosophical statements and the pedagogic aims that are persuade; And that the required amount of time passes by to be able to evaluate achievements, weaknesses, possible diversions and new needs not attended by the Law in effect, so that its partial substitution or its total derogation, if necessary, is carried out in an informed way and with the maximum success guarantees.

Education is such a sensitive matter, which cannot be ruled from political partial expositions though these could be considered to be very valuable. It is an entire society, with diverse ideological and cultural trends, the one which must deal with its Educational System, that will be a common property though the different territorial Administrations assume its management and, therefore, the responsibility in front of the public opinion of its successes and failures. An Educational System may achieve the increase of the educational level of all the people along the time and the successive generations of citizens, separating the more politically rooted aspects and opening spaces for the great social consensus.

In more than thirty years of democratic history in Spain, the Educational System has been ruled by four General Laws of Education, and some others of organic character that have regulated different aspects of the educational practice, while during more than 100 years, it had been the same Law (the Law of Public Instruction of 1857 - known as " Law Moyano " - the one that had regulated in a general way the Education in Spain. A Moyano law that, with partial reforms, had been perpetuated in the different political regimes of our country, from the Monarchy up to the Second Republic and the dictatorship.

Though the approval of the LOE supposes the shoring of the cycle of political - educational alternation, it has the great virtue of repealing the laws and parts of previous laws that were in force, so it carries out an important educational simplification, leaving only the LODE of 1985, as a legislative reference of organic character about the right to education that establishes the Spanish Constitution. Curiously, in spite of the lack of regulation stability that the fast caducity of these four general laws has generated in something more than three decades, the Organic Regulatory Law of the Right to Education (LODE) that gives juridical structure to the constitutional principles which established the right to education, has been kept in these 23 years and continues in force at present, with the changes that with equally organic character have been introduced to adapt it progressively to the complex and changing reality of the Spanish education. It is an example that regulation stability is possible.

That is why we claim for the extension of this normative stability of the last Law of Education, LOE, in a situation that the political parties would consider the maintenance of the status quo, so that all social actors should know and respect the rules of the principal educational system of all the Spanish citizens.

In terms of Cámara (2007) in Spain we must reach " *an agreement that allows to establish a few solid bases for an educational system with a wide projection of future, over of which every Government that is formed by political alternation inherent in the democratic system does not feel the temptation or the need to undo what in substantial aspects the precedents did, without*

prejudice that they could apply the legitimate own policies in this area that do not suppose an alteration of the substantial lines of establishment and development of the system shared by all."

The Spanish Educational System requires a normative stability that should reach, at least, 16 years or four legislatures - with horizon in 2024-without changes in the Organic Laws of the right to education guarantee and of general arrangement of the System: Organic Regulatory Law of the Right to the Education (LODE, 1985; with the organic changes introduced later) and the Organic Law of Education (LOE, 2006). These laws must remain in force to assure the stable normative framework education needs for the achievement of the general aims proposed. The necessary changes in the regulation of both laws for its adjustment to the new needs that would appear in the future, will have to be agreed in the heart of the Sectorial Conference of Education that is the organ of coordination of the educational policies of the whole State and where the Educational Administrations of the different Autonomous Communities are represented.

The key to the necessary educational improvement we all defend is the regulation stability of a wide parliamentary and social base that assures the functioning of the education of the country, along with the requirement of a major endowment of resources and a better management of the System (to both, Central Administration and Educational Administrations of the seventeen Autonomous Communities).

3. Increase of the expenditure in education

Though educational expenditure in Spain has increased in the last decade, the reality is that it has descended about our Gross Domestic Product and its effect in per capita income, moving away from the average of the OECD and from the EU, so that, at present, it does not correspond with the level of relative wealth our country enjoys. As the School Board of the State informs, in its last published report, (CEES, 2008), the evolution of the educational public expenditure in Spain during the decade 1997-2007, has diminished in proportion to its Gross Domestic Product.

The information on table 1 shows the numbers of the public expenditure in education in 2006 (latest with closed information) of 42.231,1€. This number supposes an increase of 8,4 % on 2005, being 9,1 % for the non university education and 6,7 % for Higher Education. Deducing the financial expenditures, as it is considered in the international methodology, these increases turn into 8,9 % for the education in general and into 9,3 % for non university and into 8,6 % for Higher Education. of participation in the GDP, the public expenditure in education of the year 2006 is ranked in 4,31 % that in case to deduce the financial expenses would be 4,28 %.

Table 1
Evolution of the public expenditure in Education in Spain. 1997-2007¹

	Amount (millions €)	% G.D.P.
1997	22525,50	4,47
1998	23831,90	4,42
1999	25554	4,41
2000	27284,60	4,33
2001	29006,90	4,26
2002	31238	4,28
2003	33625,40	4,29
2004	35923,20	4,27
2005	38511,40	4,24
2006	42231	4,31
2007	*45.149,6	4,32

As we have said, Spain has grown for years over the average of the OECD, but the public investment in education is increasingly proportionally low. The different reports by OECD corresponding to the period 1995-2003, place Spain to the tail of thirty members of the organization in educational expenditure about the GDP, only ahead of Turkey and Japan. In this period, the gap had increased: Spain turned of dedicating 4,6 % to educational expense to dedicating only 4,3 %, whereas the average of the 30 countries raised from 5,3 % to 5,5 %.

The international comparison, with the average of the thirty countries of the OECD, with the 27 countries of the EU and with the averages of the EU to 15 and to 27 members, of the expenditure effort of expense Spain carries out in educational matter is presented in the table 2, where there is expressed the percentage of GDP that has been allocated to education in the period 1994-2004.

It is the analysis of this information what leads the State School Board to formalizing the following recommendations to the Educational Administrations of Spain: to urge the Public Administrations to do a significant increase of the budget in education so that the Spanish young population can be between the " best educated " of Europe; to urge the educational Administrations to make effective what is foreseen in the article 155.2 of the LOE, in order to fulfill the established aims and to reach, in the shortest possible term, the level of the countries of the EU in expenses on the GDP as well as in annual expense per student, applying budgetary efficiency criteria; to urge the educational Administrations to make an effort to reach the European average and that of the OECD in the mobility scholarships included in the different European Programs; and, to increase the investment in education up to a 7 % of the GDP by the end of the next legislature, to overcome the structural deficits of years of investment below that of other countries of our context.

¹ * Provisional Data. Source: MEPSYD, 2008.
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Table 2
Total public expenditure in education about GDP.

	1994	1999	2004
Denmark (1)		8,09	8,47
Swiss	7,10	7,39	7,18
Cyprus	4,80	5,45	6,70
Finland	6,70	6,24	6,42
Belgium			5,99
Eslovenia			5,85
France	6,00	5,93	5,81
OCDE			5,80
Austria		5,79	5,44
Hungary (5)	6,10	4,66	5,43
Poland (2)		4,78	5,41
Portugal		5,42	5,29
United Kingdom (4)	5,40	4,57	5,25
UE – 15			5,21
Lituania	5,60	6,13	5,20
Nederland	5,10	4,76	5,16
Letonia	6,10	5,81	5,07
UE - 27			5,07
Estonia (3)	5,50	6,11	4,98
Malta ..		4,39	4,86
Irlanda	5,90	4,51	4,72
Germany		4,50	4,59
Italy	5,00	4,70	4,58
Bulgary			4,51
Chec Republic		4,04	4,37
España	4,70	4,38	4,25
Eslovaquia (2)	3,90	4,40	4,19
Luxemburgo (4) (6)			3,87
Greece (4)	3,00	3,63	3,84
Rumania		3,36	3,29

Source: Eurostat, 2003.

- (1) Expenditures in post secondary education (not including upper post secondary education) is not apliccable
- (2) Includes expenditures of childhood attention at pre-primary level
- (3) In the years 1994 and 1999 It includes expenditures of childhood attention in pre-primary level
- (4) There is not included imputation of expense of pensions
- (5) Public expenditures in educational institutions.
- (6) Higher education expenditures are not applicable

This increase of expenditures should assure the total gratuitousness of education from 0 to 18 years both in the network of public centers and in those supported with public funds, increasing significantly, at par of the demand, the public school positions available for the infantile population

aged under three-years-old; something already stated as a priority in the part of the Government. With equal emphasis, the necessary equalization of teacher – student ratio must be already achieved among the public centers and the charter schools supported with public funds, which at present keep a very high ratio.

4. Social and territorial cohesion. Municipal implication.

The contribution of education to the economic development and to the accumulation of human capital affect the growth of the productivity, as the economists remind us and how it was assumed by the European Council in its meeting of Lisbon 2000. Even more in an economic region, as the European one, that has decided to focus its economic growth in the construction of the Knowledge Society to compete with the rest of economic forceful areas of the world. Therefore, the health of the Educational System turns into a social cohesion guarantor and the territorial cohesion, as well as into a mid-term guarantor, of economic cohesion among the territories of a State.

Not only inside Spain, but also in the bosom of the European Union (for raising the speech to a geographical and juridical framework that reduces the level of passion of the debate), the social and territorial cohesion is a key matter in the construction of a common identity and in the guarantee of an equitable and solidary offer of basic services to all citizens. Education, in this respect, is objective and engine of the social and territorial cohesion that is claimed.

The concept of territorial cohesion goes beyond the idea of economic and social cohesion so much by extending it or reinforcing it. From a political perspective, the aim is to help to achieve a more balanced development reducing existing disparities, preventing territorial imbalances and increasing coherence of sectorial policies. Understood cohesion hereby as the territorial entities, being local or regional, which are basic elements of the political and cultural harmonized set of a State. It is clear, therefore, that the regional fact and the territorial problematic are questions of eminently political treatment but they are, necessarily, in the base of the achievement of an Educational Agreement.

The Educational System must be a guarantee of the social and territorial cohesion of Spain, in such a way that it assures the geographical mobility and the effective equality of opportunities for all the Spanish, European and third countries citizens, with independence of the place of the State in which they would fix their home. The minimum education or basic aspects of the curriculum (in the new terminology of the LOE of 2006) offered by school Centers of the whole State must guarantee this mobility and, therefore, they are a central aspect of the cohesion. Along with this, it corresponds to the State applying a compensation policy of means and resources in the neediest zones and of control and accountability of the budget arranged for the compensation in terms of improvement of the global performance of the System.

To the need to harmonize the autonomous legislations in matters as relevant as the use of official languages or the available financing for services maintenance and educational investment, the Sectorial Conference of Education, must guarantee the development of the educational opportunities in rural areas by means of specific plans of support rural schools and approximation of formative resources to the homes of the citizens. The comparative indicators of performance of the system in the different Autonomous Communities and between the regions or diverse geographical zones of every Autonomous Community, report of noticeable performance differences that are necessary to approach.

The social and territorial cohesion will not be possible in Spain without the necessary municipal implication in educational matters. To the responsibility entrusted at present to the local authorities on the facilitation of the construction and the maintenance of school buildings, it is necessary to add up, during the next legislature, the implication of the municipalities in the improvement of education

that attributes new responsibilities and transfer of financing to attend them, by means of a Local Agreement, depending on its number of inhabitants: guaranteeing the opening of school centers between September 1 and June 30 of every year offering educational complementary activities in the schools; coordinating and implicating municipal services with the educational school team; its implication in certain school plans as those of conviviality, building learning networks, enhancing reading or other similar activities; disposal of shared personnel with the school centers in the areas of education and social work, health education and local development. The municipal collaboration must be increased in out-of-school services as transport, school dining room, morning classrooms and extracurricular activities. In this new social scene it is desirable that this increasing participation of the municipal entities in education would be the start for the creation of real educational cities in which all the institutions and associations are involved in the education of children and young people, but also, beyond the education period, in that of the rest of the citizens.

5. Institutional autonomy

Educational centers claim greater management autonomy. The pedagogic and organizational autonomy that is already guaranteed by Law must be assure with the regulation that develops it. Inside this pedagogic autonomy there should be contemplated the disciplinary philosophy and the complementary activities of attention to diversity. The autonomy of management and of financing must be extended by means of the implantation of contracts - programs agreed between the center, public or supported with public funds, and the administration for the attainment of concrete aims with agreed deadlines and additional financing. It is necessary to agree the progressive professionalization of the administrative school services with the incorporation of non educational staff in ratios equivalent to the rest of countries of the EU and of the OECD. It is necessary to guarantee the figure of the professional administrator of the educational center and advance more in the professionalization of the center's management.

A brief review of the legislation of application in the whole state, in force nowadays, about the autonomy of the Educational Centers allows us to know which is the starting point to attain the previous aims. The LODE (1985) in its article 19 establishes the participation of the educational community in the activities and in the organization and functioning of the public centers (title III), with references to private centers (Arts. 25 and 26) and to the centers supported with public funds (Art. 55). The LOE (2006) already establishes that

The flexibility of the educational system entails necessarily the concession of its own space of autonomy to teaching institutions. The need of providing a quality education to all the students, at the same time taking into account the diversity of its interests, characteristics and personal situations, forces to admit them a capacity of decision that affects both to its organization and to its way of functioning. Though the Administrations should establish the general framework in which the educational activity must be developed, the centers must have an certain degree of autonomy that allows them to adapt its action to its concrete circumstances and to the characteristics of its students, with the aim to obtain educational success for all them.

Experts indicate that autonomy, by itself, is not a quality factor. To make viable the pedagogic autonomy of educational centers, it will be necessary to take into account diverse factors in mind: (a) the autonomy cannot be imposed by decree on the entire educational system at the same time; (b) the autonomy must be based on an educational and social consensus, must be planned in the long term and its implantation must be carried out in a progressive form. The areas of autonomy they claim are: elaboration and effective management of centre projects; participation in the contracting of eventual teachers; provision of the resources in the part of the administration and its management; determination of teachers training and their evaluation; evaluation and accounting in the part of the centre. For all this, it's undoubtedly needed the establishment of an experimental plan of the diverse autonomy areas, with the voluntary participation of some centers.

Let's not deceive ourselves; the exercise of the institutional autonomy is not something that could be achieved in an exclusive way with an organizational regulation. The institutional autonomy supposes a new pedagogic culture of work in the educational centres that has to plot from the school institutions themselves. The norm should establish the adequate statutory conditions that make possible to construct this institutional autonomy from the Centre itself. We claim, therefore, inside an Educational Agreement of State, the establishment of these normative conditions that allow the centers that progressively are demanding it, to exercise the institutional autonomy at the pace they require to make it possible.

6. Quality and equity

OECD indicators and the comparative documents of the EU inform us about the quality of performance and conditions of equity of the system. The current situation is that Spain must improve in many of these indicators and, therefore, to commit herself in a term of 12 years or three legislatures (horizon of 2020) to: to diminish school failure; to place the results of school performance in the international evaluations in the average of the OECD (PISA reports and similar) with specific education improvement plans of the instrumental subjects (languages and mathematics) and of the scientific - technological area in primary and secondary obligatory education; to raise to 70 % the level of the population taking post obligatory studies (it would be 80 % among under 34-years-old population); and to increase the percentage of students taking vocational training studies in Spain (36 % of the total that continues post obligatory studies) up to reaching the average of the EU (55 %).

The quality and the equity of the Educational System do not have to be alternative purposes but complementary. There is no quality in a system that is not equitable, nor desirable equity that resigns to greater quality. Primary education, specially the Obligatory Secondary Education will have to be provided with the necessary organizational flexibility, the resources and enough personnel to facilitate all the students the achievement of the key competences that guarantee the attainment of the cultural, social and human capital that correspond to them as citizens and that the EU has centered on eight key competences. The Educational System will have to assist with material and human specific resources students who belong to groups of high risk of social exclusion. The rates of drop outs and school failure must diminish up to being equal, at least, in the term of twelve years (2020) to the average of the European Union. The extension of the Guidance Departments in the centers with the incorporation of new professionals and its implementation in Primary Education Schools will be reached in the term of the following twelve years.

PISA report itself, as it will be seen hereafter, contemplates the value of equity as necessary and as an aim to be reached in our school system. For that, the experts, consider necessarily to promote plans of actions that guarantee a quality education and equality of opportunities for all, improving the performances of students with lower levels and stimulating those of greater talent. Also it is believed necessary to stop the concentration of disadvantaged students in the public centers and to develop policies of equity of gender in the mathematical and scientific education, to break the beliefs that which these subjects are more appropriate for boys.

Table 3
 Early educational drop outs
 Percentage of population between 18 and 24 years old that it has not completed their Secondary Education 2^a stage and don't take any kind of training

	1996	2001	2006
Eslovenia		7,5	5,2
Chec Republic			5,5

Poland		7,9	5,6
Eslovaquia			6,4
Finland	11,1	10,3	8,3
Austria	12,1	10,2	9,6
Lituania		13,7	10,3
Denmark (2)	12,1	9	10,9
Swiss	7,5	10,5	12
Ireland	18,9		12,3
Hungary		12,9	12,4
Belgium	12,9	13,6	12,6
Netehrland	17,6	15,3	12,9
United Kingdom		17,7	13
France	15,2	13,5	13,1
Estonia		14,1	13,2
Germany	13,3	12,5	13,8
UE 27		17,3	15,3
Greece	20,7	17,3	15,9
Cyprus (2)		17,9	16
UE 15	19,9	17,6	16,1
Luxemburgo	35,3	18,1	17,4
Bulgary		23	18
Letonia			19
Rumania		21,3	19
Italy	31,7	26,4	20,8
Spain	31,4	29,2	29,9
Portugal	40,1	44	39,2
Malta		54,4	41,7

Source: MEPSYD, 2008 (taken from Eurostat: Active Population European Suervey)

The main indicator that informs about the situation of school failure in Spain is the level of early educational drop outs of the school population without managing to finish basic obligatory education. It is alarming that in Spain the numbers are near the 30 % (only overcome by Portugal and Malta) in the set of 27 countries of the EU, very far from the averages of EU 27 and EU 15. In fact, Spain duplicates the rate of failure of the EU 27. And the most concerning of this problem is that the trend observed in the decade 1996-2006, does not allow to shelter reasonable hopes of decreasing this rate. The studies on failure inside the Spanish territory, announce that the Autonomous Communities with greater failure are Ceuta (52 %), Valencia Community (39,7 %), Balearics (38 %) and Melilla (37,5 %). Opposite to them, the Autonomous Communities which level of failure is alike to the EU 15 average, are Asturias (16,5 %) and the Basque Country (17 %), followed by Navarre, Cantabria and Castile and León, the three with less than 22 % of drop outs. Considering these aspects, it is difficult that Spain, as it has been warned, will fulfill the aims on early educational drop outs, which was settle for 2010 by the Strategy of Lisbon. The forecasts set in 85 per cent the percentage of students that must obtain the title of upper Secondary or post-

obligatory: Bachillerato or middle Vocational training degree. The axis of equity is in the achievement of new basic qualifications for all. We refer to the profile of basic aptitudes that they all must have as minimum qualification that allow to take part actively in the labor, familiar and community life to all levels, from local to provincial, national and transnational.

The new basic aptitudes are qualifications for ICT, languages, technological culture, enterprising spirit and socialization skills. This list is not necessarily exhaustive, though certainly it covers fundamental areas. The list does not imply either that the traditional aptitudes of literacy and elementary arithmetic are not important anymore. But it is necessary to indicate that it is not a relation of topics or subjects like that we know from our school years or of studies, but it specifies wide areas of knowledge and competences, all of them interdisciplinary: learning languages, for example, it implies the acquisition of technical, cultural and aesthetic capacities to communicate, to act and to appreciate. Therefore, the general, professional and social capacities are superposed increasingly by its contents and functions. Using another term of sociological character, it is a matter of guaranteeing a worthy social salary for all the citizens. It is the minimal aim that an advanced company must demand itself. All the citizens, without exceptions, must be included in this demand. This is called inclusion. Opposite to the aim of social inclusion that cannot be a reality without educational inclusion, there appears the groups at risk of social exclusion nourished by population of citizens that do not have access to the system or are in risk of dropping out the system that guarantees the cultural salary. Example of groups at risk of social exclusion are: minors in social adverse contexts; minors in unstructured families; rural population; adults in unemployment or in precarious living conditions; ethnic minorities; immigrants; people with special educational needs.

Though the establishment of these competences leaves the problem of its evaluation in the hands of professors, it is true that the European Framework of Reference for education itself on the basis of these competences and other international works are reporting of the appropriate evaluation and elaborating indicators, criteria and instruments to facilitate the educational labor. There are already criteria and instruments to measure some of the key competences as that developed by the project PISA to measure reading comprehension, mathematical skill and the mastery of sciences. In addition there exist other references as those developed by the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF) that describe the different levels of mastery of foreign languages. The publication in 2000, 2003 and 2006, of PISA successive reports, the Program for International Student Assessment of the Organization for the Cooperation and the Economic Development OECD, has supposed for the Spanish society the beginning of a debate on the quality of education and schools in our country, spreading to the streets the debate teachers, professors and other professionals of the education, were keeping in the teachers' rooms in the last decade. As it will be presented in the following tables, in the report of 2000, Spain was in the position 12 out of 18 countries participants of the European Union. In the report of 2003 Spain was in the position 6 of 19 countries of the European Union participants. In the last report of 2006, Spain occupies the position 20 out of 25 countries of the European Union participants in the study.

Table 4. *PISA 2000*

	Average	Aptitude reading	Aptitude mathematics	Aptitude scientific
Finland	540	546	536	538
United Kingdom	528	523	529	532
Ireland	514	527	503	513
Austria	514	507	515	519
Suiwss	513	516	510	512

Belgium	508	507	520	496
France	507	505	517	500
Chec republic	500	492	498	511
OCDE	500	500	500	500
Denmark	497	497	514	481
UE-15*	495	498	494	494
UE – 27*	492	494	491	492
Hungary	488	480	488	496
Germany	487	484	490	487
Spain	487	493	476	491
Poland	477	479	470	483
Italy	474	487	457	478
Portugal	461	470	454	459
Greece	461	474	447	461
Letonia	460	458	463	460
Luxemburgo	443	441	446	443

* 32 countries participating. There are no data of Netehrlands, Estonia, Eslovenia, Eslovaquia, Lituania, Bulgary, Rumania, Cyprus and Malta. Source: OCDE, 2002.

Table 5. *PISA 2003*

	Average	Competence reading	Competence mathematics	Competence scientific
Finland	545	543	544	548
Netehrlands	525	513	538	524
Belgium	515	507	529	509
Swiss	510	514	509	506
Chec Republic	509	489	516	523
Ireland	508	515	503	505
France	506	496	511	511

Germany	499	491	503	502
UE-15*	499	496	501	498
OCDE	498	494	500	500
UE – 27*	497	493	499	499
Austria	496	491	506	491
Poland	495	497	490	498
Denmark	494	492	514	475
Hungary	492	482	490	503
Letonia	488	491	483	489
Eslovaquia	488	469	498	495
Luxemburgo	485	479	493	483
Spain	483	481	485	487
Italy	477	476	466	486
Portugal	472	478	466	468
Greece	467	472	445	481

41 countries participating. There are no data from Estonia, Eslovenia, Bulgary, Rumania, Cyprus and Malta. United Kingdom is out of the report since answer rates are too low to assure the comparison. Source: OCDE, 2004.

Table 6. *PISA 2006*

	Average	Competence reading	Competence mathematics	Competence scientific
Finland	553	547	548	563
Netherlands	521	507	531	525
Estonia	516	501	515	531
Belgium	510	501	520	510
Ireland	509	517	501	508
Eslovenia	506	494	504	519
Germany	505	495	504	516
Swiss	504	507	502	503

Austria	502	490	505	511
United Kingdom	502	495	495	515
Chec republic	502	483	510	513
Denmark	501	494	513	496
Poland	500	508	495	498
UE-15	498	492	498	503
OCDE	497	498	492	500
France	493	488	496	495
Hungary	492	482	491	504
UE – 27*	490	483	491	497
Luxemburgo	485	479	490	486
Letonia	485	479	486	490
Eslovaquia	482	466	492	488
Lituania	481	470	486	488
Spain	476	461	480	488
Portugal	471	472	466	474
Italy	469	469	462	475
Greece	464	460	459	473
Bulgary	416	402	413	434
Rumania	410	396	415	418

* 57 countries participating. There are ni data from Cyprus and Malta. Source: OCDE, 2007.

The reading of these tables, inform us clearly about the place the Spanish education occupies in this evaluation ranking of the Educational Systems in developed countries and about how this place does not correspond with our GDP, our revenue per capita, even the less with the volume of public expenditure in education. How to improve the level of the evaluated competences? In the aspect most experts make emphasis is on the suitable training of teaching staff on primary and secondary education. The social changes are demanding new literacies and skills that refer to the knowledge of motivation strategies, knowledge of the didactic action in sociocultural diverse contexts and knowledge of intercultural education among others. To improve the levels of reading, mathematical and scientific competence of our students, there will be necessary to favor the creation of mixed team of teachers of different levels and institutions and to develop educational research projects,

along the improvement of the organizational and social and labor conditions (spaces and timetables) of the professors so they would get involved in these tasks of educational innovation and research.

7. Adult people education and life long training

At present, Spanish population older than 25-year-old who follows activities of education or continuous training supposes a 5,5 % of the total opposite to 8 % that, as average, does it in the rest of countries of the EU. In quantitative terms it is needed a commitment to reach, within twelve years or three legislatures (horizon 2012), this average value. But, to fulfill the aims of the EU as for lifelong education it becomes necessary: to create an integration network of the systems of ruled vocational training and of occupational training that assures the mutual recognition of the granted certification; to guarantee the universal and constant access to life long learning; to increase the investment in training centers and human resources; to improve the methodology of education applicable to adults continuous training; to improve accreditation and transparency of the certification of the learning achieved in terms of reached competences; to improve the services of information, guidance and counseling on lifelong education and to offer opportunities of lifelong learning close to the interested parts. For all this it is needed to write a Lifelong Training National Plan that integrates the Education of Adult People, Vocational training and Occupational Training.

Only the strengthening of the adult training system, the integration of the different lifelong training subsystems and the achievement of a learning close to people by means of local lifelong training options, can provoke the improvement of this situation. The nearness of the training offer to the adult, will be necessary based on the potential ICT offers us for the education based on the use of the computer and the network and it will necessarily become a learning in conciliation with the labor life and the familiar life of the people. Taking into account the challenges and the changes stated before, and in order to contribute to the attainment of its strategic aims, Europe has formulated the following aims for the programs of education and training: a) To improve the quality and the efficiency of the systems of education and training in the European Union; b) To facilitate public access to all the systems of education and training; c) To open the systems of education and training for a wider population.

Table 7

Percentage of the population between 25 y 64 years old taking a training program in European Union countries

	Total	Male	Female
United Kingdom	22,3	26,3	18,6
Finland	18,9	21,4	16,5
Denmark	18,4	20,7	16,2
Swiss	18,4	21,2	15,7
Netehrlands	15,4	15,9	16,9
UE-15	8,5	9,0	7,8
Luxemburgo	7,8	6,6	9,1
Ireland	7,7	8,8	6,5
Austria	7,5	7,4	7,6
Belgium	6,5	6,3	6,8
Germany	5,9	5,6	6,2
Spain	5,0	5,4	4,5

Italy	4,6	4,7	4,5
Portugal	2,9	3,3	2,4
France	2,7	3,0	2,4
Greece	1,2	1,1	1,2

Source: Eurostat 2003 referred to 2002

As for the first aim " to improve the quality and the efficiency of the education and training systems in the European Union", one of the main challenges to be faced by them is that of improving the programs of initial and continuous training of the teachers and teachers trainers, so their knowledge and capacities meet the changes and the expectations of the society, and to adapt to the variety of groups they educate and train. For the attainment of the second aim " to facilitate the access to all to education and training systems" it will be necessary to know the form in which the systems of education and training are organized can hinder wide access of the theoretically target population. Are the systems flexible enough? Do they offer the possibility of joining at different ages? Is it easy to change training paths? Do all the paths allow to accede to the highest levels of education or training? As for the third aim " to open the systems of education and training to a wide population" Europe faces the challenge of achieving its systems of education and training to be competitive. People want to decide by themselves where to complete their training, so it is necessary to develop clear strategies focused to make more attractive the European systems of education and training, so much to the eyes of European as of non European population. For that, it is basic to reinforce the bounds with labor life, research, and society in general.

8. Dignifying the teaching function.

Dignifying the educational function will allow to attract young people with the most desirable professional profile in the next decade to the profession. The system of access to the public educational function will have to be reformed so that it guarantees the selection of those with better professional competences reached during their initial. The process of improvement of initial training Universities are carrying out to fulfill the European directives on teachers' initial training and professors of secondary education in 2010, will have to be accompanied in the following eight years (2016) of the following measures: recovery of the purchasing power of the educational salary lost in the last ten years with raises higher to the increase of the CONSUMER PRICES INDEX and wage review clauses; specific training and incorporation of economic incentives for the development of tutorial functions; strengthening of disciplinary attributions and juridical support to professors.

The measures of voluntary early retirement and reduction of working hours for people older than 55 years must provoke in the next decade a decrease of the average age of the Spanish teaching staff that at present is one of the highest in Europe. In all the countries in Europe, the population of professors is old, in Spain, it is older due to the great effort on education and, therefore, the extension of educational staff carried out in Spain by the ends of the 80s. It is reasonable that, in the next ten years, at par of the pension, it will join a teachers' new great cohort of teachers. It is necessary to attract the most capable young people to this process of education professionals incorporation.

The attractiveness of the profession can only be constructed by dignifying the educational function. An essential element for dignifying the educational function is, today more than ever, related to the endowment of staff in the centers depending on the real needs to attain diversity and the effective coverage of sick leaves. Only in this way there can be achieved a suitable climate of educational work. In addition, stimulated lifelong training that includes guidance and counseling in singular training itineraries must be connected to the development of the educational career.

It is essential that the educational profession is integrated by a motivated and highly qualified staff to assure new generations to receive a quality education. The new expectations and challenges which professors face in Europe at present have placed them in the center of the political debate. The improvement of professors training will be, therefore, an integral part of the work program on future objectives of the educational and training systems, approved by the European Council in Barcelona on 15th and 16th of March, 2002 and that will spread until 2010. The program considers teachers are key actors in any strategy which aim is to enhance the development of the society and the economy.

Teachers have to face also more heterogeneous groups of students than in the past for which they might feel insufficiently prepared. The heterogeneity comes, mainly, from two sources: the integration of immigrants and that of students with special educational needs. In Spain, the extension of the period of obligatory education and the restructuring of compulsory education, have aggravated the difficulties teachers experience in the education of their students.

The conception of an educational career which can be characterized as "plane", supposes a strong factor of disenchantment for the educational function. Spain, in the set of the European Union, is the country where the salary is less increased with the pass of the time, and where the occupation of managerial positions, the assumption of new educational responsibilities or the achievement of professional aims are less paid.

Along with all these aspects, the most important element to dignify the educational function is the social support perceived by the professors. The support of the students, the Educational Administrations, the families and the media. The educational figure of the professor is, in Spain, discredited so much inside like outside the classroom. The teacher needs to perceive social support out of the classroom, in the immediate context and the social context, to exercise inside the classroom an educational function for which it is necessary a moral authority, granted, first by the students and the families, and reinforced, in any case, by the administration itself.

9. Evaluation of the system and social commitment

The educational administrations have to extend and to generalize the culture of evaluation and improvement of the Educational System both, of the centers and of the professors. The accountability is the base for the extension of the State Educational Agreement to the entire society, its institutions, the economic and social agents and the media. The coordination of efforts is claimed for the integration of the formal, not formal and informal education in the general ends the Agreement intends and the social projection of the positive image of education and professors.

The State School Board informs about the different evaluation studies and the participation in international projects, undertaken by the Educational Spanish System at present. The Institute of Evaluation carries out the Evaluation of child education, the Evaluation of primary education and the general Evaluations of diagnosis of the System. The international programs of evaluation in which Spain takes part are the following ones: Project INES of the OECD; Project PISA centers "; Project RNFIL (Recognition of the non formal and informal learnings); Development of added value models in the educational systems; international Study of education and learning (TALIS); Project PIAAC (Program for International Assessment of Adult Skills); Production of an European bank of articles for the evaluation of foreign languages skills (EBAFLS); Permanent group of indicators and points of reference (SGIB); international Study " Learning to learn "; European Indicator of linguistic competence; international Study PIRLS 2006 (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study); International study ICCS (International civic and citizenship study) on civic and civil education; international Study TEDS-M (Teachers Education Study in Mathematics) on the initial training of

primary education and secondary education mathematics professors. In addition, the Institute of Evaluation is involved in the construction of a State system of indicators of education, already published in its first versions, of which there have been established those who are considered to be a priority.

It is true, therefore, that the Educational Spanish System is provided with indicators of evaluation, is decided to take part in international programs and to develop own programs to diagnose general as well as particular aspects of the functioning of the System and to point out the opportunities of improvement. The Institute of Evaluation, which gathers the experience accumulated by the INCE or the CIDE in previous stages, seems to be a good organizational tool for this achievement. It is not enough to carry out the evaluation. The diffusion of the evaluation results and the shared decision making process that must generate the relevant information of these evaluations are necessary to reach the social complicity education needs. The improvement of education is a problem of the whole society. Of those directly involved, students, professors and families, and of the rest of social agents. Only the improvement of the efficiency in expenditures and the efficiency in performance, assessed by regular evaluation processes, can give confidence on the Educational System back to the society.

10. Education of citizens committed with constitutional values

The civic education of citizens is a guarantee of the strengthening of a civil society committed with constitutional values of the Spanish State. The migratory changes concerning Spain which are better reflected than in any other aspect, in the origin, cultural and religious diversity of the students in the classrooms, as well as the need of a progressive construction of a European citizenship, advise to assure civic education in the obligatory levels of education. The incorporation of a specific subject, Education for the Citizenship in the school curriculum has to be, therefore, equally consolidated in all territories of the State. The centers, in their pedagogic autonomy, must program and organize the specific curriculum both of this subject and of those other complementary activities for the moral and religious training of the student demand by the associations of parents and other alternative activities to attain a correct school organization. The School boards in each Center must assume the responsibility of this organization following the common directives of the Educational Administrations.

The education for the citizenship has to include the pedagogic work with the social agreed values of a plural society but, in addition, there is necessary a formal established and recognized process (as Camps indicates, 2007), for: *"creating a common and shared ethos in which the individuals recognize and feed their moral identity"*. But beyond the education in social agreed values, the education has to face the training in constitutional values. In paragraph 2 of the article 27 of the Constitution it says that the object of education will be the full development of the human personality in the respect towards the democratic principle of conviviality and to the fundamental rights and freedoms.

Cámara (2007) has deepened on the interpretation of the constitutional rule, identifying in it: *"An object (full training according to opened contents), a more general and inclusive purpose (full development of the human personality), some specific aims according to it and to its institutional role in the democratic State (respect to its principles and to the fundamental rights and freedoms therefore, a positive orientation to strengthening the respect towards people's dignity and human rights, training for free and responsible participation, favoring tolerance, peace and religious, ideological and political pluralism) and a few limits (the same respect, in the exercise of the public legal authorities and in that of the rights, of the indicated principles, which define the constitutional order as a whole)."*

It is a constitutional principle independent from the ideological and religious beliefs citizens support; independent, likewise, from the singularities of their culture of origin or their belonging to concrete ethnic groups, independent from any territorial context inside the State. The constitution is not a bank of values that could be consumed à la carte or that could be interpreted in different ways by the different Educational Administrations responsible of regulate and propose the didactic guidelines and the curricular material to study subjects as Education for the Citizenship. It is the State Central Administration the one that must establish the common framework that guarantees the access of all citizens to the values established in the constitution.

With the same emphasis, in the paragraph 3 of the same article 27 it is guaranteed to the parents the right for their children to receive a religious and moral training according to their parents own convictions. Since both principles have to be guaranteed avoiding the collision between them and in the framework of a state defined as a non-denominational state, the problem for the establishment of an educational agreement, as continues indicating Cámara (2007) has to start from the stabilization of the religious education in all the centers so as to guarantee: *"a) conscience integrity and religious freedom of the students; b) respect the right of parents to chose freely the religious and moral training of their children, and the school must arrange all the means to accept and respect it; c) no discrimination for reasons of ideology or religion can be allowed; and d) the aims and general ends of the education orientated to the free development of the personality of the*

students, are for all the students, independently of their ideological and religious options. On these bases, no matter how difficult it can be to attain it, the agreement is unequivocally possible”.

We claim therefore, for a State Educational Agreement, both the establishment of the common framework of interpretation of all the constitutional values, and the agreement between the State, the educational communities and the religious entities, to make possible the moral training that guarantees the constitution.

11. Conclusion: a consensus that can not be postponed

Puelles (2007) has revealed that “consensus and dissent constitute the two sides of the same reality”. If we are capable of overcoming the comprehension of the educational phenomenon as an exclusive good, no matter it can be individual, cultural or territorial, and to harmonize it with a comprehension of the educational fact as a public phenomenon that affects equally the entire State, from an open and respectful conception towards cultural diversity, we will be in the base of the negotiation of a State Educational Agreement.

There have been many attempts, since the approval of the Constitution and, therefore, the formalization of the first educational agreement. In its article 27 are clearly reflected the efforts made to achieve the school agreement in Spain. Some offers have been made from unions, professional groups and political parties, and, in fact, some agreements have managed to be formalized to local and regional level. Maybe the social maturity and the political opportunity to reach this agreement that cannot be deferred are now given in Spain.

The proposals we make here are not difficult to subscribe for a wide parliamentary majority. The support of the principal social forces close to the main political parties in the national context will be necessary to keep the agreement along the time. We know that this is not an easy matter, but we do know it cannot be postponed. The Spanish society is demanding it and deserves it.

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