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Impacts on Students**

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Recontextualisation of the Bologna Process: Impacts on students¹

Marina Elias

Abstract

Bernstein's concepts of 'recontextualisation', 'framing and classification' and 'visible and invisible pedagogy' are used to help understand the development of different power levels at university and to exemplify how a major European policy is being implemented at each level of power, using Spain as an illustrative country. The specific implementation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in Spain has created unexpected consequences both for lecturers and students. Because of this, it is now necessary to analyse the implementation of the policies at each level of power and the consequences of these implementations at each stage. Any study of policy management in line with the European Higher Education Area must first analyse the implementation context and then undergo analysis again to assess whether the implemented policies have been carried out as expected. This analysis should also include an appreciation of the consequences for the actors in that context.

Introduction

The current situation in universities involves structural changes, cuts in budgets, massification, and an alteration in the demands students and society make about the aim of the university: this is widely known by those working within this institution. There is also the question of what is the purpose of the university in a globalised and internationalized world? Every day it becomes more apparent that policy becomes even more globalised and that certain policy trends are shared by Western countries. Taking this into account, we have to ask ourselves if it is necessary to change the university mission (that is to say, a specific orientation with corresponding aims, rules and values).

¹ This article is based on the seminar 'Recontextualisation of the Bologna Process: Impacts on students', 30th June 2011. HAVE seminar (Centre for Research in Higher, Adult and Vocational Education), University of Nottingham. Some parts of this paper are published in Elias, M. (2011) 'Implementing the Bologna Process: an example of policy recontextualisation – the case of Spain'. In: Brennan, J. and Shah, T. (eds.). (2011). *CHERI (Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, Open University) final Report: Higher Education and Society in Changing Times: looking back and looking forward.*

The questions are: Does the university have to maintain its previously elevated position in society? Is it important that it still gives students a chance to think about theoretical and abstract knowledge? Or does it have to shift its curricula to a useful knowledge, one that is oriented towards the labour market demands?

These are difficult questions with controversial answers. First of all, it is clear that — far from establishing itself as a univocal and unitary subject — the missions different universities assume are ambiguous and multiple. Therefore, it may be more appropriate to speak about the 'missions' that the university sets itself and more prudent to wait for each institution to meet a more carefully defined combination of this multiplicity of missions.

Related to this, universities' perceptions of students have also been changing. The image of students as essentially learners and institutional actors is decreasing. Since universities are now perceived as service providers, students consider themselves as consumers, conscious of what they expect in terms of educational experience and its returns. Because of this they possess the ability to make decisions rationally based on optimal information.

This image also appears to be internalised by students, impacting the way they relate to higher education and universities. As some studies report, student/university relations are becoming increasingly marketised, as evidenced by students' increasing adoption of a managerialist and consumerist discourse. Also their attitude towards their participation both in university governance and quality assessment, indicates a consumer interest in, and demand for, information on both the university's quality and rankings, as well as in the 'value-added' arising from attendance and investment in higher education. This instrumental vision about learning is combined with an extrinsically driven motivation towards grades. There is also the perception of higher education not only as an essential right, but also as a service whereby a degree is a prerogative derived from paying fees (Tavares and Cardoso, 2011).

Policy Globalisation

Nowadays, governments tend to manage universities from a 'distance'. Therefore, the relationships between the state and its public services, the market and the reference community are being completely revised

in the West (Clark, 1998; Neave, 2003). Basically, due to reductions in state financing, universities have to assume a larger part of the responsibility and the risk of failure in a competitive environment (Henkel, 1997).

Aligned with these trends, quite a large number of universities have changed the balance between their missions and by, trying to make their services more appealing, they have increased emphasis on the professionalising mission. At the same time, these institutions have tried to pay more attention to students, by helping them in their development (as it relates to their learning and personal change) at university (Witte, 2006). The change in some university degrees profiles towards a greater emphasis on overtly professional components is a symptom of this new balance of missions (Troiano and Elias, 2006).

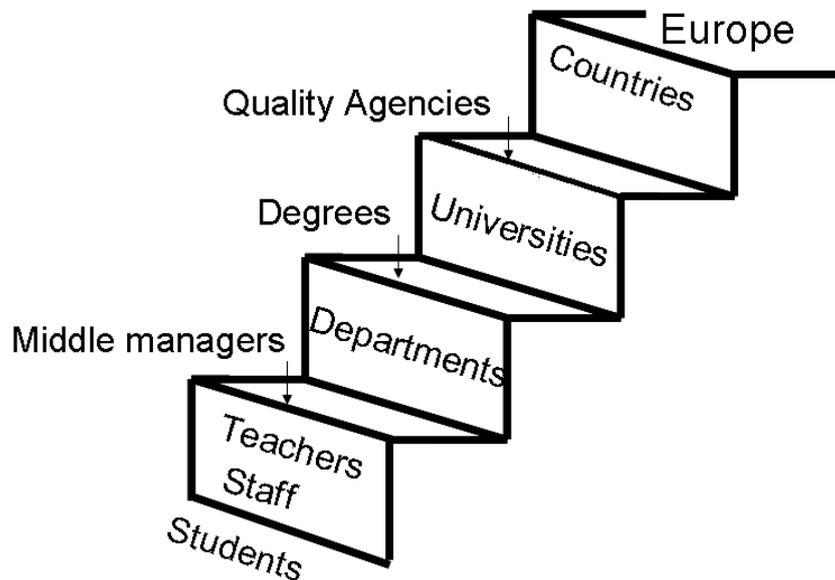
There are many different actions that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) may carry out to operate effectively in these new circumstances. Some universities respond by adopting a business ethos because they consider it may create an advantage in a more competitive environment (Symes and McIntyre, 2000; Harris, 2005; Troiano et al 2007). From the society and student point of view, education is embedded in the discourse of meritocracy and there is an expectation of obtaining qualifications for inspection in the labour market.

Levels of Power

Both aspects – levels of power and recontextualisation – are fundamental to the understanding of policy implementation. This framework is proposed for the purpose of analysing changes that have occurred and are currently in play in higher education.

Related to governance management at university, there is the idea of progressive levels of power. The picture of stairs (Figure 1) could be used to show different levels of power relevant to higher education. Power at university is not developed by one person alone, instead there are different decision making levels. When a policy is implemented it is basically taking into account each level of power in order to understand how this policy will be pragmatically enacted.

Figure 1. Policy implementation: Actors involved and levels of power



The policy implementation process must take into account the transformations which may occur at different levels of power within an organisation. In this picture (Figure 1) we can see Europe on top, but globalised policy might also be located in that position. At university we have to include each HEI, degrees, departments, middle managers, teachers, staff and students. Each has its interests, culture, rules and aims. In this sense, when a policy is implemented each level translates the policy into something else.

For example, university degrees play an important role, since they translate (recontextualise) the guidelines by selecting contents, establishing curricula and outlining teaching methods. In this sense, even the implementation of a top-down policy does not usually retain its original concepts but changes, in some respects, at each level of power. Neither is the policy implemented as originally planned at the 'top', because of the changes that are made at each level of power. The 'stairs' metaphor is useful not only for top-down policies, but also for bottom-up policies, starting from the bottom and working their way to the top.

With faculty staff possessing considerable autonomy, power has become dissipated (Kezar, 2001; van Vught, 1989). Despite the fact that the 'rules of the game' for university professors have changed considerably over the last few years (Henkel, 1997), faculty staff continue to play a main role in the implementation of innovations (Troiano and Elias, 2006).

Bernstein: Recontextualisation

'Recontextualisation' was a term used initially by Bernstein (1990), particularly in relation to social actors – especially those involved in symbolic production – institutions, such as universities and churches. More recently this has also involved the media, international organisations and the state who together produce and disseminate legal knowledge, both in the strictly scientific and the ideological sense (Bernstein, 2000; Vaira, 2004).

This concept, although only theoretically developed, is used by Bernstein (1990) in a more complex and critical way than it is currently used. In a nutshell, regarding Bernstein, in educational institutions, this discourse undergoes a process of recontextualisation, that is to say, it undergoes a process of transforming itself into a pedagogic discourse. At each level of power, laws and norms are translated, and in the end, when these norms are developed in the classroom, their main ideas are introduced as a pedagogic discourse. In this sense, 'as an institution, the education system plays a key role in transmitting dominant ideologies of society. One of the ways it does this is through the reproduction and maintenance of a standard variety of a language through which, in turn, notions of national and cultural identity are transmitted' (Clark, 2005).

Bernstein developed a model containing a sociological theory of pedagogic communication that distinguishes what is transmitted in the educational systems, from the transmission process. He distinguishes 'what' is transmitted (the content) from 'how' it is transmitted (pedagogy). He argues that reproduction social theories are only interested in the 'what' in respect of the consequences of the process (for instance, if gender topics are explained only from male point of view, or ethnic issues are little considered, or social class conflicts are explained as a problematic movement from lower-class people). Bernstein points out that understanding 'how' is essential to understanding the structure of pedagogic discourse (how teachers

transmit their ideas, how they structure the class and their objectives). In this sense, he develops a critical discourse about this process. It is therefore important to note that what happens in the classroom explains (and reproduces) what happens outside and has consequences outside, in general, in the society (it reproduces the society again). Bernstein explains that the curriculum is produced by selecting elements of the discipline, expressing what counts as legitimate knowledge in a concrete context (Abbas et al 2008).

Most sociologists are interested in what is developed in the classroom, in terms of curriculum and content, but Bernstein was one of the first sociologists to highlight the importance of analysing pedagogic discourse ('how' the content is transmitted).

A couple of Bernstein's Theoretical concepts are developed (1977) in connection with curriculum analysis:

- Classification: boundaries between the taught contents – 'what' is transmitted.
- Framing: clarity between what can be transmitted and cannot – 'how' it is transmitted. This includes selection, organisation, and sequence of content. It also includes pacing, timing, and assessment, as well as student/staff relations.

Strong classification and framing then become part of an added code capable of being directly related to visible pedagogy. Weak classification and framing are part of an integrated code and are therefore related to invisible pedagogy.

In his book 'The Structuring of Pedagogic Discourse' (1990) Bernstein develops the pedagogic device concept. It is the means of transmission of power relations out of the school (social class, gender, patriarchy, religion and race relations). In other words, the pedagogic device concept can be used to translate power relations into discourses of symbolic control and to translate these discourses into power relations. This is defined by three hierarchical sets of rules:

- Distributive: Distribution of various forms of awareness among different groups. These rules are responsible for distributing the power between the groups that have access to what is thinkable or unthinkable. What is thinkable is transmitted at the primary school and high school levels (the reproductive part) and what is unthinkable

concerns those responsible for the production of discourses (higher education or other specialized agencies). So several control mechanisms are required to gain access to the high school level.

– Recontextualisation: This regulates the construction of specific pedagogic discourse. Recontextualisation separates regulative discourse and instructional discourse and defines the relationship between them both.

– Assessment: specific pedagogic practice.

Two recontextualising fields are explained regarding the transmitted classification and framing.

Official recontextualisation field (ORF), is regulated by the state and the legislative power. Pedagogic recontextualisation field (PRF), defines the relative autonomy of pedagogic discourse and affects pedagogic official practice. It is made up of educators from schools and higher education institutions and education science departments, specialized journals and private research foundations.

Added to this, the pedagogic discourse of reproduction (PDR) is the result of recontextualisation of the official discourse through the PRF.

Pedagogic discourse appropriates other discourses through the recontextualisation process, and the relative autonomy of educational discourse. As such the practice of transmission will rely greatly on this process, which takes place in the PRF, within which different positions, agents and practices develop a discursive production. Because of this, text can be removed from one context and relocated to another.

In a nutshell, Bernstein applied the concept of recontextualisation to the pedagogic process. In this process, different actors adapted and defined qualification at different levels, selected content, wrote curricula, and developed teaching methods as well as establishing standards. At lower levels, the 'pedagogical recontextualising field' (PRF) is composed of managers, teachers and technicians. For this, Bernstein considered the official pedagogic discourse as a player element of inequality, with a spirit from top to bottom. While at the same time, he was able to demonstrate the existence of the field of recontextualisation pedagogue, i.e. the actors were able to resist or adapt to the official line².

² See Troiano *et al* 2010, for a further analysis.

In higher education, middle managers play a key role in the process of recontextualisation; reinterpreting the policy in relation to traditions, culture and disciplinary needs. Other actors in the institution, e.g. teachers and students, tend to perceive the overall reform in the light of the type of recontextualisation that has been carried out in their context.

A recent investigation has used Bernstein's conceptual framework in order to analyse the relationship between education and the labour market. This investigation explains how students are also part of recontextualisation. It concludes that the learner recontextualisation (LR) is:

'What learners make of these recontextualisation processes varies according to personal characteristics, group/cohort and the scope for action they have in any particular environment. Learner recontextualisation takes place through the strategies learners themselves use to bring together knowledge gained through the programme and gleaned from working with more experienced people in the workplace. Together with their prior learning, tacit knowledge and opportunities for action, these may be unequally distributed and may sometimes involve learners in the creation of new knowledge, insights and activities. Learner recontextualisation is critical to the development of a professional and/or vocational identity. It entails understanding and articulating the reasons for the constitution of their chosen occupation and their reasons for wanting to join it. It also influences their motivation and engagement with the other processes of recontextualisation.' (Evans et al 2007:10)

Both levels of power and recontextualisation are fundamental to understanding policy implementation. In the remainder of this paper, these two concepts will be used to review the implementation of the Bologna process.

Recontextualisation of the Bologna Process

Bologna is an intergovernmental process that seeks to establish a European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The EHEA's aim is that all countries, currently with 46 involved, implement policies to ensure mutual confidence and recognition. They must also work towards enhancing the quality, attractiveness and comparability of qualifications, as well as promoting student and staff mobility around EHEA. The process aims to contribute to economic, social and political objectives of all partners in the course of promoting learning and research. More specifically, the political authorities in charge of guiding the reform indicate that one of the axes of European harmonisation is

the search for the employability of graduate students through the definition of professional profiles. There is also a desire to emphasise the central importance of the skills and competences that graduates bring to the labour market³.

The various guidelines and official laws, however, are undergoing a process of recontextualisation, in the sense that the different authorities and agents involved in them are adapting official texts (EUA, 2005). The reception of the process is received differently according to the national–local policies and cultures (Kogan, 2003; Vaira, 2004; Witte, 2006).

Harmonization and divergence might appear contradictory, but this is not necessarily the case. Broadly speaking, the Bologna Process has a convergence aim to homogenise universities around Europe. Because each country has different traditions and cultures, the changes they will need to make in order to arrive at the same finishing line will differ. This does not mean that one country is closer to the Bologna Process than another. For example, Spain came closer to the Bologna Process aim on lifelong learning, but not on teaching focused on learning. Moreover, in each country there are different levels of power within their different traditions and cultures. For this reason the recontextualisation analysis is needed and the balance between flexibility and harmonisation is valid at each level of power. From a governance point of view, it is also concluded that recontextualisation is necessary in order to arrive at the final aim of convergence (EUA, 2005).

In each country, the implementation of the guidelines of the Bologna Process has been different. Also it has been different for each university, faculty or university degree, since it has been implemented in a relatively flexible way, according to different needs. Another Bologna Process feature is that some politicians take it as a brand (or flag) to explain the necessity to make changes that would otherwise be difficult to justify. Some countries had tried unsuccessfully to introduce changes at universities similar to Bologna Process trends, and the EHEA was seen as a second chance to do so. The Bologna Process is used to implement many policies, some of them not explicitly related to the EHEA.

³ See Elias, M. 2011, for a further analysis of Bologna Process.

General perceptions of the Bologna Process

Generally speaking, there has been an oscillation between scepticism and suspicion. The most optimistic views on the Bologna Process sustained by many politicians and researchers, consider the reflection and the changes that it may involve to be an opportunity to improve the effectiveness of the university system (Valle, 2005).

However, critical voices quickly began to make themselves heard. Some of these objected to the way that, despite the process being aimed at provoking major changes in the re-evaluation of European universities, it was leading to generalised confusion (Mora, 2005). According to this view, the establishment of the EHEA is taking place within the framework of a global process, the characteristics of which are common to most Western countries. So, governments do not presently tend to directly govern universities, but rather use the means of what has been called 'governance'. In this new framework, assessment systems are more closely linked to rewards and accountability, which involve replacing the 'trust principle', thereby reducing the dependence on public funding and introducing market mechanisms to higher education (Harris, 2005; Tomusk, 2004). The entry into the EHEA has, repeatedly, been a further step by universities in their search for private funding and not the beginning of it, as some authors claim. It appears that the tendency will be for this situation to increase even further due to the economic crisis that has existed since the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Current European reform is oriented mainly towards the labour market demands. The emphasis on 'employability' is reflected in the extension of the general need to 'professionalise' more studies. However, in practice it often takes a specific form that runs the risk of widening the generic model based primarily on the 'competences' pedagogic discourse about skills, which is sometimes undertaken without a proper analysis of the meaning or even a complete analysis of the context and the possible implementation consequences. Furthermore, the Bologna Process in Spain started later (around 2004) and the pedagogic discourse of skills was implemented in all degrees, taking little account of discipline, tradition and cultural diversion. 'Competences' are being applied rather bureaucratically, sometimes involving confusion and with the consequence that content and knowledge have been relegated to a secondary position (Masjuan et al 2007).

It is too bold to say that the Bologna Process is the only factor in Spain involved in this movement to market dynamics. Globalization, including policy, educational expansion and economic crisis and the weakening of the welfare state, has also been important.

In Spain, a discourse on the need to professionalise university students had already emerged during the 1980s through the political authorities of the Ministry of Science and Education (Sánchez Ferrer, 1996). It became more important with the increasing access of students to university, which has diversified the social origins of all the students, bringing new expectations, attitudes and demands to the university (Troiano, 2005; Langa and David, 2004; Masjuan and Troiano, 2003).

What happened in Spain is similar to other European countries, where, in the 1990s, university transformations took place initially in opposite directions. However, the changes that have occurred more recently, in the early 2000s, have resulted in convergence (Teichler, 2009). In this sense, it is a clear case of some countries using the Bologna Process as a brand to implement different policies, despite some of them not being clearly related to Bologna.

Specific recontextualisation of Bologna Process: ECTS as a centred teaching – learning conception

The definition of quality education has been modified by the Bologna Process. It is now generally considered to be more student-centred, more constructive and useful for the future. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) aims to promote the introduction of the formal language of student-centred teaching. This was not developed at the beginning by official Bologna Process declarations, but some countries, including Spain, developed it behind the Bologna Process brand.

The Spanish government⁴ has introduced changes in teaching and learning processes in order to meet students' requirements to fit into current labour market needs. A comparison of Spanish universities with other European universities reveals that certain maladjustments between school methodologies and student needs were problematic.

⁴ Almost all policy levels have a quality agency with an important paper on the implementation process. In Spain the State agency, and even more the agency of Catalonia, (Autonomous Community with regional government) lead the process in this region.

Thus, the introduction of the EHEA has been regarded as an opportunity for improvement; since it involves a reappraisal and subsequent reform, of existing teaching methodologies. Basically, there is a need to develop the kind of teaching that stimulates lifelong learning, a form of active learning that can help students to learn in a more constructive way. The idea is that learning involves student commitment and active participation. In short, learning does not arise from didactic teaching. This necessitates a change in mindset with regards to the way teaching and learning is approached, and because of this a change in the attitudes both of academics and students is required (Ferrer et al 2004; Elias, 2010).

This specific recontextualisation of the Bologna Process and concretely of ECTS is not a Spanish idiosyncrasy. An important report in the Bologna Process policy 'Trends 2010' identifies four priorities, the first of which is full exploitation of the link between the Bologna Process and curricular and pedagogical renewal, with continued emphasis on student-centeredness, lifelong learning and diversity. Trends 2010 report mentions:

'The Bologna Process should be regarded as a means to an end. Its main goal is to provide the educational component necessary for the construction of a European of knowledge within a broad humanistic vision and in the context of massified higher education systems with lifelong access to learning that supports the professional and personal objectives of a diversity of learners.' (EUA, 9: 2010)

This paradigm implies a change in the roles of students and lecturers, which means that lecturers should accompany students throughout their learning process and fulfil a tutorial function. The series of methodologies and actions included in this teaching paradigm are, for example, learning through discovery, problem based learning (PBL), learning based on the student's own practice, cooperative work and role-playing. In this sense, there is also an expectation of more coordination between subjects and interdisciplinary activity between different knowledge areas.

Thus, considering Bernstein's concepts, the idea would be to change from a lecturer-based model with a strong classification and framing (visible pedagogy), to a student-based model with a weak classification and framing, i.e. a model based on the invisible pedagogy.

We should point out that notions and concepts that are presently used in the academic environment regarding active, constructive, and discovery learning (which are included in the notion of European credits that originated centuries ago), are based on the pedagogic principles of those movements of school renewal that started in Europe and Spain in the late nineteenth century (Masjuan, 2004).

Academics' and students' perceptions of the Bologna Process⁵

It is important to mention just some of the assessments surrounding the Bologna Process in Spain, because of the specific implementation on ECTS. As previously mentioned, implementation depends on recontextualisation at each level of power, with each level bringing to bear different meanings. The roles of the middle manager and basic unit are fundamental in this process. There are different assessments depending on the concrete implementation, but myself and colleagues have collected some data that is shared in most of the degrees and universities in Spain. Academics' (including managers') concerns may be summarised as follows:

- There is a clear lack of funding to carry out the processes of change (EUA, 2005).
- This student-based education system involves many more hours of work for lecturers, often in large classes, in which they must implement methodologies that are closer to students' point of view (seminars, tutorials, continuous assessment, etc). In some degrees there are lessons with 60–70 students per class, which implies real difficulties with regards to the development of the student-based education system.
- There is a complex and contradictory process that has not provided more time for lecturers to assimilate and stabilise the changes.
- Lack of coordination and too many reforms have taken place in a short period of time, which adds to the constant lack of resources (Masjuan et al 2007). Quick changes entailed confusion, scepticism and reactions against the reforms.

⁵ These results come from a most part of research done by GRET, research group of Autonomous University of Barcelona. For further information: university publications at www.uab.cat/gret. One of them is a research work from the 'Plan Nacional de investigación científica, desarrollo e investigación tecnológica' (CSO2008-02812) financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, under the title 'Los estudiantes ante la nueva reforma universitaria'.

- In Spain, for some degrees, this more constructive student learning system has not still succeeded because of the speed, confusion and lack of resources to develop it.
- Big changes, without enough resources, could mean less change at the end, and burned-out actors who have been devoting effort to carry out this reform.
- Accordingly, in this case, the recontextualisation process creates confusion about the general policy and what it implies in a particular context.

The students' views are more complex. All of the results I am going to present come from a research carried out from 2007-2011 with questionnaires and interviews done to students.

Obviously there are, for instance, different profiles of students, different HEIs, and different disciplines (Masjuan and Troiano, 2009). However, generally speaking, students' perceptions of the changes are both positive and negative.

Positively, they believe that the methodological changes are theoretically beneficial, in the sense that they can improve their learning. Moreover, because teaching methodologies imply more teamwork, seminars and presence in class, students feel more integrated and engaged. The introduction of the Bologna Process has caused students to spend more time at university because of the requirements of the pedagogic methodologies. As a result of this, the increase in the students' physical presence appears to lead to more academic identification with the university among the students. Increase in physical presence also tends to increase the interactions between colleagues and lecturers. This in turn contributes to an increase in social identification with the university among students, through the constitution of university reference peer groups. The improved social identification with a university reference peer group seems to create a positive effect on the students' academic identification. So social identification would appear to add value to academic identification if a student simultaneously experiences academic and social identification with the institution, since he or she is more likely to benefit from improved engagement.

We can conclude, departing from students perceptions, that certain signs of the reengagement of students with the institution have been observed. In some cases, there seems to be a departure from the

previous tendency that led to disengagement and distancing between students and the institution (Elias et al 2011).

Students consider that, due to the way in which the Bologna Process is being implemented (fast, without enough resources and with insufficient information), it is producing negative outcomes such as confusion and feelings that the aims are unclear. This negative assessment is shared with academics.

The data shows that students need to feel that they have achieved a minimum threshold in some aspects defining quality education. Factors such as the organisation of the schedule, the calendar, appropriate assessment strategies and information and guidelines by the lecturers, are elements that should not necessarily be valued negatively by the students. Students may feel that they have some control over these opportunities and because of this devote themselves to studying and learning. The last European Commission ECTS Users' Guide reflects this relation between credits and learning outcomes, with changes related to ECTS entailing an increased workload. Accordingly, students are becoming more strategic, undertaking superficial or deep actions according to the tasks required. Thus, the effects were not those expected and in some respects the opposite of Bologna Process aims.

Many students also concluded that the Bologna Process developed a masked privatisation of the university, making higher education more elitist. They considered that the increase in workload made it more difficult to combine work and study, a clear problem for working class students (the main reason is because they had to do additional work to pay their fees). Moreover, some university taxes have been increased in the last few years. 2009 to 2010 saw many strikes and demonstrations. Currently, the environment seems to be calmer, but the latest political decisions (for instance, doubling the university fees) may, once again, involve student mobilisations.

Conclusions

The recontextualisation framework is useful in that it takes into account both the macro politics and the various actors in each level of power. Further developments of research should follow this because the Bologna Process has entailed changes that affect the daily lives of university actors (staff, teachers and students). However, sometimes policies that are successful in one context are applied to another

without a proper analysis of the contextual differences, their implementation needs, or possible consequences.

We have seen how the Bologna Process is hindering the access and persistence of students with fewer economic resources, who have to work while studying. This process could imply a return to a more elite university model in conflict with notions of equity and social justice. This effect of the Bologna Process was not anticipated.

Theoretical conceptual tools from Bernstein seem useful in analysing the consequences of the Bologna Process, in terms of both analysing the policies' implementation and its consequences; including the impact on its actors.

In further investigations it would be advisable to analyse the impact of the changes related to the Bologna Process by considering different student profiles (gender, social class, etc), so that, as Bernstein would point out, not only 'what', the consequences, but also 'how', the explanatory mechanisms of those impacts, are explored.

One way to carry out this analysis is by using Bernstein's concepts of classification and framing, visible and invisible pedagogy, reviewed in this article. As Bernstein concluded, middle-class students with positional families usually have more difficulties in understanding an invisible pedagogy school model. Is this relationship also valid in high education? Are the changes related to the implementation of the Bologna Process in Spanish universities – with a model closer to invisible pedagogy – an obstacle for middle-class students?

It is clear that widening participation at university, and the massification of universities, does not directly imply more equity and social mobility. Because, for example, universities with the most success at widening participation also have the highest drop-out rates (Higher Education Funding Council for England [HEFCE], 2006). From the economic point of view, the increase of non-traditional students at university is analysed as a prejudice, without any benefit.

So the widening participation issue is not only about recruitment but also retention. Non-traditional students, without the appropriate cultural capital or relevant social capital, may potentially find themselves in the wrong place, with a higher risk of dropping out their studies. Therefore, the question that needs to be asked is what is the

connection of these processes with the high level of drop-outs in the current Spanish university system?

It is important to bear in mind that greater widening participation may serve to show other patterns of exclusion and reinforce the binds of elitism in society. If this is the case then it must be asked if inequality risks are intrinsic to legitimising meritocracy?

Our research group is currently developing projects and analysis in order to answer these questions.

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