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CURRENT «POLICIES OF KNOWLEDGE» IN THE EUROPEAN UNION: MAPPING AND CRITICALLY ASSESSING «QUALITY» IN A «MEASURABLE» EUROPE OF KNOWLEDGE

«Políticas de Conocimiento» Actuales en la Unión Europea: Diseño y Evaluación Críticos de la «Calidad» en una Europa del Conocimiento «Medible»

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the content and the different «dimensions» of «quality» in the current «policies of knowledge» of the European Union as they are specified by the renewed Lisbon Strategy and in the frame of the construction of a «measurable Europe of Knowledge». The study analyses critically the policy discourses and policy practices of the European Union from 1994 to 2010 using both primary (e.g. official documents) and secon-

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dary (e.g. scholarly articles, studies and research) sources. It consists of four sections: The first section refers to the current constructions of quality discourse in the European context (e.g. globalization, knowledge economies and GATS, new public management, new governance, etc.). In the second section, we examine the integration of «quality» in the EU's discourses and policies (Treaties, Action Programs as well as in the general, vocational and higher education initiatives). The third section reviews the quality discourse in the context of the late EU's policy processes (Lisbon, Bologna and Copenhagen). In the final section we put forward a critical reading of the «audit/quality» nexus based on a «policy by numbers» technocratic-managerial rationale aiming at the construction of a measurable «Europe of knowledge».

KEY WORDS: Quality in Education, Quality Discourse, European Education Policies, Audit/Quality Nexus, Measurable «Europe of knowledge».

RESUMEN

Este artículo investiga el contenido y las diferentes «dimensiones» de «calidad» en las actuales «políticas de conocimiento» de la Unión Europea, del modo en que están especificadas por la renovada «Estrategia de Lisboa» y en el marco de la construcción de una «Europa del Conocimiento Medible». El estudio analiza en profundidad los discursos políticos y las prácticas políticas de la Unión Europea desde 1994 hasta 2010, utilizando a la vez fuentes primarias (por ejemplo, documentos oficiales) y secundarias (por ejemplo, artículos, estudios e investigación académicos). Consta de cuatro secciones: La primera sección se refiere a las actuales construcciones del discurso sobre la calidad en el contexto Europeo (por ejemplo, globalización, economía del conocimiento, la nueva gestión pública, nuevos gobiernos, etc.). en la segunda sección, examinamos la integración de la «calidad» en los discursos y políticas de la UE (Tratados, Programas de Acción así como las iniciativas generales, vocacionales de la educación superior). La tercera sección revisa el discurso de la «calidad» en el contexto de los actuales procesos políticos de la UE (Lisboa, Bolonia, Copenhague). En la última sección, presentamos una lectura crítica del nexo «auditoría/calidad», basado en una «política de los números», de objetivo tecnocrático-gerencial de la construcción de una «Europa del conocimiento» medible.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Calidad en Educación, Discurso de Calidad, Políticas Educativas Europeas, Nexo Auditoría/Calidad, «Europa del conocimiento» Medible.

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INTRODUCTION: QUALITY IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

The present EU rhetoric towards the «Europe of knowledge» has been influenced by the economic, geopolitical and technological transformations occurring at the European and global levels and the challenges they pose for the Union. It has been vested with new imaginary and symbolic ideotypes (globalization, knowledge based economies and societies, Network societies, risk societies) (CASTELLS, 1998; HELD and MCGREW, 2000; ADAM, BECK and VAN LOON, 2000), and its emergent «regimes of truth» and «systems of knowledge» have permeated the EU politics, policies and practices. Among these discourses, «Quality in Education» has occupied an emblematic position: It hypostasizes, both in symbolic and substantial terms, a «paradigm shift» in the current European Union's «knowledge politics» aiming at the emergence of a new European educational discourse and at legitimating certain types of educational reform, both at the national and European levels (GREK, LAWN, LINGARD and VAIO, 2009; OZGA, DAHLER-LARSEN, SEGERHOLM and SIMOLA, 2011). This discourse of «Quality in Education» has been subjected to different interpretations and has been used extensively to account for changes in different contexts:

a. At the level of theory, the concept of 'Quality' emanates from the economy and business discourses of late 1980s. It is based on views emphasizing organizational planning, management and outputs, and it is linked with the introduction of a technocratic and managerial vocabulary used in corporations (with concepts such as «competitiveness, «productivity», «efficiency», «accountability» and «economic effectiveness»), in the public sector (MORLEY and RASSOL, 2000). Moreover, Quality discourses connect to the renewed «human and social capital» theories (BARON, FIELD and SCHULLER, 2000; LITTLE, 2003), signaling the transition from the theories of social reproduction and human capital to more «technocratic» approaches of regulation, adjustment, new public management and governmentality (MARSHALL, PETERS and FITZSIMONS, 2000).

b. At the economic level, «Quality» is connected to the «market driven» economic paradigm (liberalization of markets and trade, also visible in WTO and GATS regulations), which promotes a «banking concept of knowledge» also supported by the discourses of international organizations (OECD,

World Bank, IMF). These approaches opt out for new forms of human resources management, in a changing landscape of modes of production and division of labour, often described in terms of competitiveness, pliability, flexible production forms and «flexicure» work relationships (OECD, 2000; STONE, 2000; ROBERTSON, BONAL and DALE, 2002; BONAL, 2003; OLSSEN, 2004). These perceptions coincide with the erosion of the public character of education, which is gradually transformed into a marketable commodity. A market is then built around knowledge, thus creating a situation of «academic capitalism», assessed in terms of the market efficiency and effectiveness (SLAUGHTER and LESLIE, 1997; ARONOWITZ, 2000; GIROUX, 2003).

c. At the political level «quality» is coincided with advocating a minimalist and «evaluative state», «audit society» and «accountability regimes» based on benchmarking, monitoring and control mechanisms of national education policies, which make extensive use of «technologies» of surveillance, peer reviewing and evaluation. As an example, the introduction of the Open Method of Coordination by the EU, has actually resulted in establishing an educational Panopticon and has promoted the construction of a «measurable» Europe of Knowledge, putting forward a «governing by numbers» mechanism, by sheer quantification and comparative assessment of educational outcomes. Allegedly, it imposes, using «comparative evaluations», unquestioned compliance to common goals, determined by mutually accepted indicators, methods and frames of reference (NOVOA and LAWN, 2002; ROOM, 2005; LAWN, 2006, 2011; GREK, 2008; SHORE, 2008; PASIAS and ROUSSAKIS, 2009).

d. At the educational level, it is inexorably linked to the introduction of new patterns, modes and practices of education, which signal the transition from «visible» to «invisible» pedagogies (BERNSTEIN, 1996) and from a «knowledge-based» to a «test-based» learning framework of schooling, and prioritizes measurement and assessment of knowledge (OZGA, 2008). It is materialized by a «competence-based» educational system which emphasizes new modes of evaluation and assessment procedures and promotes accountability of every aspect of education (DEAKIN CRICK, 2008). In this framework, school is becomes a «neutral» factor, a chain of externally determined elements which can transform varying inputs to desirable outputs (APPLE, 2001).

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Educational reform planning, informed by «Quality» discourses, promotes the above mentioned new perspectives about «human» and «social» capital, linking learning processes to the acquisition of new academic and workplace competencies, which correspond to the changes put forward in the new terms and standards of production, division of labour and consumption, inflicted by the «knowledge economy» (BURTON-JONES, 1999; STONE, 2000). «Academic knowledge» is thus limited to and replaced by «performative knowledge», which emphasizes its instrumental elements, and its potential to accomplish certain prescribed results, relevant to the world the market and the economy (BALL, 2001). As a result, education is colonized by technocratic managerial perceptions, and operates based on a discerning set of ideologies and practices, the introduction of techniques for the evaluation of the work done in schools, for the accountability and surveillance of teachers, concrete objectives and control procedures, and continuous assessment of student achievement (GLEESON and HUSBANDS, 2001; GEWIRTZ, 2002; RANSON, 2003; BALL, 2003).

In this new internationalized, competitive and permanently changing economic environment in which the education sector is required to operate, terms like total quality management, quality assurance, benchmarking, monitoring, standards and indicators, define the basic tenets of knowledge-based economies' instrumental discourses, which have a profound impact on various levels of social life and education (OECD, 2002; MAGALHAES and STOER, 2003; MARCUSSEN, 2003; FLOURIS and PASIAS, 2008). They inform «choice» which is a means of transferring responsibility for education to its «clients / consumers». In this framework, what is actually evaluated is the «quality of services» offered and outcomes achieved rather than the substance of policies for achieving quality (Gewirtz 2000).

1. QUALITY IN THE DISCOURSE AND POLICIES OF THE EU

EU was a latecomer as far as quality in education is concerned. The issue had already been high in the agenda of other international organizations (such as the OECD and the World Bank, but also UNESCO) and certain states (e.g. the U.S, the U.K and France) (HEYNEMAN and WHITE, 1986; OECD, 1989; DOHERTY, 1994; MATTHEOU, 2005). A substantial turn in the Union discourse on 'Quality' happened in the early

1990s and can be coincided (or connected) to a number of factors / parameters such as:

a) The institutionalization of education as a Community competence. In the EU Treaty (Maastricht, 1993; Amsterdam, 1999) the concept of 'quality' is connected with that of 'lifelong learning' creating a strong symbolic dipole. Article 126 of EU Treaty (1993) stated that «the Community contributes to the development of quality education». In the Preamble of the Treaty of Amsterdam, the Union leaders stated their determination «to promote the development of quality education for their people» by broadening access to education and through its continuous updating.

b) The stance of the supranational EU institutions, especially of the European Commission, to seek an enhanced role in educational affairs of the newly founded Union and to promote their own discourses for education in Europe, a task which, according to certain scholars, had been pursued since the 1970s (POLLACK, 1994).

c) The change in perceptions about the role of state in Europe, the main features of which were the decline of the interventionist, distributive, post-war welfare state, the strengthening of neo-liberal concepts of public sector downsizing and the prevalence of views supporting a managerial role of the state in an environment of a free market (DOHERTY, 1994), varying from the role of a «night-watcher» to that of a «strategic head-quarter». These views also affect the debates for education in Europe, making it easier to introduce the (already strong) discourses of 'effectiveness', 'quality' and 'evaluation'.

In the period following the ratification if the EU Treaty through the first decade of the 21st Century, «Quality» has always been a strongly stated objective and a priority both at the level of EU «policy talk» (e.g. the texts produced by the Union institutions, the Commission, the European Parliament etc) and at the level of «policy practices», the specific Union activities (such as Action Programmes) involving every aspect of education (higher education, vocational training, school education, lifelong learning — see Table 1) (PASIAS, 2006).

In «policy talk», quality has been linked to «quality assurance» discourses, while in «policy practice» it has been linked to «quality

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assessment» processes (VAN DAMME, 2000). In this vein, quality and evaluation are viewed as the two sides of the coin, both reinforcing the introduction of «techno-managerial» procedures and tools in the assessment procedures of quality assurance systems.

In the Community texts of the period immediately following the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty (1994-1996), quality is presented as the best «response» to the challenges faced by the European Union (demographic, social, economic, technological, etc.), and to the «imperative» of improving the competitiveness of the Union and its capacity for innovation (see for example, the IRDAC report (1994) and two related White Papers, on Economy (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 1993) and Education (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 1994).

The issue of «quality» in education and training gained even greater visibility in the late 1990s, through the discussion about the perceived complementary relationship of education and training policies, to those of employment and social cohesion. In the institutional texts of that period (mainly those of the European Commission, the European Council and the Parliament), it was noted that quality education was «important», vis-à-vis the policies concerning the labour market, the free mobility of workers within the Community and the recognition of degrees and qualifications (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2000: 3). They further argued that the quality of school education should be «ensured at all levels and in all aspects of education», regardless of differences «in objectives, methods and educational needs», and regardless of the variation in the structures of the Member — States' schooling systems (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2000: 3). This growing interest on «quality in education» and its sound institutional basis in the Treaties (Art. 126, then 151) had made quality a key mediating factor between national educational policies and the relevant initiatives of EU institutions, involving the establishment of quality assurance systems, the enhancement of international cooperation, the development of quality evaluation indicators and assessment methods for education and training.

The initiatives of that period include: (a) the Socrates / Comenius III.3.1 action programme on «Quality assessment of school education — a European pilot project (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 1997), (b) the «Recommendation on European Cooperation towards quality assurance in

higher education», which invited the Member-States to develop transparent quality assessment and assurance systems for their higher education systems (COUNCIL OF THE EU, 1998b), (c) the Report on «Quality of School Education: Sixteen Quality Indicators», which called for the development of a «limited number of indicators or benchmarks» for assessing «school standards» and evaluating the quality of national school education systems (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2000b).

Table 1: Quality in Education — the EU Policy Framework

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">The symbolic objective</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">"The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organization of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity." (ARTICLE 126, EU TREATY 1993)

"The activities of the Community shall include, as provided in this Treaty and in accordance with the timetable set out therein:… a contribution to education and training of quality and to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States (TREATY OF AMSTERDAM, 1999 PREAMBLE)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">The educational objective</td></tr>
<tr><td>Higher Education</td><td>Quality Assurance and quality management (Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community 1990; IRDAC Report 1994; Berlin Communiqué 1993)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">School Education (General Education)</td><td>European Report on the Quality of School Education: Sixteen Quality Indicators (MAY, 2000)

Attainment: 1. Mathematics, 2. Reading, 3. Science, 4. Information and communication technologies (ICT), 5. Foreign languages, 6. Learning to learn, 7. Civics.

Success and transition: 8. Drop out, 9. Completion of upper secondary education, 10. Participation in tertiary education.

Monitoring of school education: 11. Evaluation and steering of school education, 12. Parental participation.

Resources and Structures: 13. Education and training of teachers, 14. Participation in pre-primary education, 15. Number of students per computer, 16. Educational expenditure per student</td></tr>
<tr><td>"the highest quality will be achieved in education and training and Europe will be recognised as a world-wide reference for the quality and relevance of its education and training systems and institutions;" (EDUCATION AND TRAINING, 2010; EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2003)

"Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training" (EDUCATION AND TRAINING, 2020; EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2009)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Eight key competences necessary for the knowledge society: Communication in mother tongue, Communication in a FL, Mathematical literacy (including science and technology), ICT-skills, Learning to learn, Interpersonal and civic competence, Enterpreneurship, Cultural awareness (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2005)</td></tr>
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Technical and Vocational Education and Training	Copenhagen Process : Common Quality Assurance Framework / CQAF (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2002; 2004) European Qualifications Framework (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2005,2007)
Lifelong Learning	Fifteen Indicators for lifelong learning : literacy, numeracy, new skills for the learning society, learning-to-learn skills, active citizenship, cultural and social skills, access, participation and investment in lifelong learning, ICT in learning, strategies for lifelong learning, coherence of supply, guidance and counseling, accreditation and certification and quality assurance. (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2002)
The five challenges for the quality of school education (European Commission, 2000)	The Challenge of Knowledge The Challenge of Decentralization The Challenge of Resources The Challenge of Social Inclusion The Challenge of Data and Comparability

2. ENTERING THE 21ST CENTURY: QUALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF «POST-LISBON» EU POLICY PROCESSES

The Lisbon Strategy (2000) signaled a broader shift in the EU discourse on education, elevating it to a key instrument in the struggle to achieve the political goals of the Union, through: (a) the institutionalization of the «Open Method of Coordination» (OMC) as a new mode of goal setting and implementing «regulatory processes», (b) an emphasis on a «high-quality general education» based on the enhancement of innovative lifelong learning structures and (c) the prioritization of the development of a «new competence framework», which would encompass the academic and workplace, professional and social competencies, deemed necessary for economic growth and social cohesion (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2001; 2005d).

The Lisbon Process for education, the Copenhagen Process for vocational education and training and the Bologna Process for higher education (although this third process did not originate from the Union institutions), have formed the constituent pillars, of the educational discourses and practices that construct, deconstruct and reconstruct the European educational landscape of this new Century (see *Table 1*). Indicative initiatives and actions of the period include:

A. The «Recommendation on European cooperation in the quality evaluation of school education» (COUNCIL OF THE EU, 2001a), which sought to support and establish «transparent quality evaluation systems» aiming, among other things «(a) to secure quality education, whilst promoting social inclusion, and equal opportunities for girls and boys, (b) to safeguard quality of school education as a basis for lifelong learning, (c) to encourage school self-evaluation as a method of creating learning and improving schools, within a balanced framework of school self-evaluation and any external evaluations, (d) to use techniques aimed at improving quality as a means of adapting more successfully to the requirements of a world in rapid and constant change».

B. Setting «quality and effectiveness» as one of the «concrete future objectives» for the European educational and training systems (COUNCIL OF THE EU, 2001B), emphasizing the education of teachers and trainers, and the introduction of new competences in their training curricula, thus connecting the «success of attempted reforms» with the quality of educators and trainers, who should «well prepared for acting in a constantly changing environment».

C. The Report on «15 Quality Indicators of Lifelong Learning» (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2002), where it is recognized that «the decision to use specific quantitative and qualitative data as 'indicators' is increasingly being taken at a high political level with a view to giving signals, to evaluate, promote dialogue and support planning in the field of education and training» (p. 8). At the same time the Commission admits that «the process of selecting indicators has reflected the complexity of the lifelong learning process itself. Lifelong learning remains an emerging area within education policy and as such its measurement and assessment methodology remains under-developed in many of the existing international, European and national surveys.» (p.6)

D. The Council and the Commission have repeatedly stated in their texts the need for national education systems to prioritize «quality assurance» towards building a «common future» in the «Europe of knowledge». At the same time they have expressed their concern about the compatibility of national systems (see, for example, European Commission, 2004a). Improving the quality and efficiency of national education systems

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remains one of the four top priority objectives in the renewed «Education and Training 2020» Strategy (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2008).

E. The «Copenhagen process», initiated near the end of 2002, aiming to enhance the European cooperation in vocational education and training and to achieve specific objectives such as transparency of qualifications (EUROPASS), credits transfer (ECVET), quality assurance and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (Council of the EU, 2002). In the Coucil Resolution establishing the process, the promotion of enhanced cooperation in VET, included «cooperation in quality assurance with particular focus on exchange of models and methods, as well as common criteria and principles for quality in vocational education and training» (p.3).

F. The «Bologna process», accelerated the development of quality assurance standards and procedures for European higher education systems (see for example the Berlin Communiqué 2003). Moreover, in the Communiqué of the European Ministers Responsible for the Higher Education in Leuven (2009), which marked the beginning of the «Bologna Process 2020» and the EHEA project for the second decade of this century, it is stressed once again that «striving for excellence in all aspects of higher education … requires a constant focus on quality» (LEUVEN and LOUVAIN-LA-NEUVE COMMUNIQUÉ, 2009).

G. The EU policy framework which prioritized quality of teachers and new competence teaching, has continued to develop even more rigorously during the second half of this decade. For example, in 2006 the Council put forward an eight-point basic competencies framework for lifelong learning (COUNCIL OF THE EU, 2006). The European Quality Framework (EQF) (COUNCIL OF THE EU, 2007) and the Council's decision to constantly keep on the agenda the quality improvement of teacher education (COUNCIL OF THE EU, 2007B), have influenced decisively the design and direction of ongoing reforms of national education policies.

3. TOWARDS A MEASURABLE EUROPE?

In the Lisbon European Council of March 2000 (23-24/3/2000), European leaders argued that «the European Union is confronted with a quantum shift resulting from globalisation and the challenges of a new

knowledge-driven economy» (EUROPEAN COUNCIL 2000: par. 1) and affirmed that the strategic, overarching objective for the Union is 'to become … the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world' (ibid, par.5). Towards this end, the European Council called the Council of Ministers for Education, 'to undertake a general reflection on concrete future objectives of education systems, focusing on common concerns and priorities while respecting national diversity'(ibid, par.27); additionally, the Council suggested that the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) would be the new process of policy formation and the 'means of spreading best practices and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals» (ibid, par.37). The implementation of the OMC involved policy tools such as indicators and benchmarks, exchange of experiences, peer reviews and dissemination of best practices (ibid, par.37a-d).

The Lisbon Process initiated a number of changes in the educational policy of the EU which, it can be argued, consist a significant shift from the European Commission's «action program approach» to the Council's «member competence-based model» (PASIAS & ROUSSAKIS, 2009). This new approach, firmly based on the OMC, constitutes a major «governance turn», entailing new policy formation processes which view education as a «soft» form of governance. OMC has been used as a steering tool along with the well-tried methods of networking and exchanging; it prioritized short and mid-term commonly agreed objectives and measurement of the progress of implementation by continuous assessment (PASIAS, 2005; LAWN, 2006; ALEXIADOU, 2007; LANGE and ALEXIADOU, 2010).

This «policy as numbers» approach, which can be viewed as a crucial part of the «audit culture», uses the OMC as a steering process of «governing at a distance» together with well-established methods in the arsenal of the EU, such as networking, exchanges, collective deliberation and other non-coercive processes and concomitant procedural norms (STRATHERN, 2000; GREK, 2008; SHORE, 2008; LAWN, 2011). It is backed-up and reinforce by new 'policy-knowledge' relations (OZGA, 2008) created in the generously subsidised transnational networks of experts; and by the designated (and transient) groups of scientists and technocrats deployed by international organizations like the OECD (LAWN and LINGARD; NORMAND, 2010). As a result, a concrete set of standards, indicators and benchmarks is now part of the heart and soul of the European policy process

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and new governance technologies for education: As Grek notes on the developments of this past decade, «…new categories of educational structures were being invented, and a different European education space was in the making; it would be governed by numbers and quality standards» (GREK, 2008: 213).

This «audit/quality» model has become both a major policy instrument and a strongly stated objective and priority of the European Commission policy initiatives. For example, in the Text of Lisbon European Council Conclusions it was also argued that «each European citizen would need a wide range of key competences in order to adapt to the rapidly changing and highly interconnected world» (EUROPEAN COUNCIL, 2000: par.9). Education, in its dual capacities, i.e. sustaining both social and economic development, was presented as the vehicle which would ensure that citizens of Europe would be equipped with the necessary competences. But, what it actually happened in the years following the launch of the Lisbon Strategy, was the gradual redefinition of several major European symbolic signifiers such as «active citizenship» and «civic competence» to fit the context and discourses of a measurable «Europe of knowledge»: initially they were designated as «concrete objectives» (COUNCIL 2001b); as time went by, they were quantified using «indicators» (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2003, 2004B; COUNCIL, 2005) and were categorized as «competences» (Council 2006); finally, they were reduced to measurable results (DE WEERD, 2005) and were cartographed as «performativities» (HOSKINS et al., 2006; 2008).

EU's growing reliance on this «audit culture» increasingly leads towards expanding the techno-economic rationalities to the broader social and civil spheres and at all levels of education. These acts of social and educational quantification are deeply politicized, as political judgments are implicit in the choice of «what» to measure, «how» to measure it, «how often» to measure it and how to present and interpret the results. This is exactly what Deakin Crick argues, when she refers to the much debated education-acquired competences: «defining 'competences' as an educational outcome for learners as well as developing indicators and assessment tools to evaluate and measure competence is even more of a political and ideological act because they constitute the technology of control» (DEAKIN CRICK, 2008: 313).

This «policy as numbers» mentality marks a shift to policy learning, as it replaces the socio-political debate, on which, most often, education policy formulation had been based, with technical expertise. «Standardization», in this case, not only takes the form of knowledge production, but also becomes a means of governance, a technology of surveillance, and a technocratic education policy advocacy tool (LAWN, 2011). As Ozga argues, «Data is now the lifeblood of education governance» (OZGA et al, 2011). The practices of benchmarking, auditing and accountability, disguise political power to technical formalities and consensual processes. In fact, they have become the main tools for providing policy makers with «hefty» arguments, expressed in terms of data, indicators and benchmarks. Lawn eloquently describes the uses of such instruments in European education: «Measuring units, benchmarks and standards are the new essentials of Europeanization, created by private and public agents, including academics. They are not fixed, they are not easily discernible, they are not an interesting or peripheral factor in the system; they are the new system of education. They are essential for governing the new economy of education» (LAWN, 2011: 270).

4. CONCLUSION

If we lend an ear to those voicing the «language of numbers», what can we learn from the discourses debating the 'audit/quality' nexus, or the emergent relations between numbers and politics? How can we respond to the observation that, the domain of «numbers» of education is becoming apparently political and the domain of «politics» of education is increasingly numerical? How do we react, for example, to the statement that «Only if citizenship can be 'measured' will it be central to the European Union policy and will survive in the post-Lisbon world»? (HOLFORD, 2008: 340).

Lisbon agenda, through its distinctive rationale, interprets the ideotype of «Europe of knowledge» to be quantifiable and measurable. A diversity of strategies —benchmarking, target-setting, peer review, expert networks, performance indicators, etc.— are mobilized in order to distract discussion from EUs political issues (legitimation and democratic deficit, lack of information and transparency) and reorient them towards the more diffuse level of the Eurocrats' governance. The «audit/quality» discourse has fully

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adopted the economic / technocratic vocabulary of competitiveness, adaptability, flexicurity, effectiveness and performativity. It advocates validation and evaluation processes based on benchmarking, assessment procedures and forms of accountability; and, it promotes technologies of spectation/gaze and mechanisms of surveillance and control, which, as we have argued, are closely linked with quality assurance, accreditation and effectiveness of knowledge practices (PASIAS, 2005; ROOM, 2005; KING, 2007; OZGA et al., 2011).

The practices of auditing and accountability seek «to provide policy makers with reference points» in terms of indicators and standards. Now, comparability is being promoted not only as a way of knowing or legitimizing, but mainly as a way of governing (NOVOA 2007: 147).

Thus, the European educational landscape is increasingly dominated by 'regimes of truth' and 'systems of knowledge', which introduce, reproduce and legitimize the technocratic rationale in order to establish a modern European Panopticon, governing by numbers and based on technologies of 'theasis', 'performativity', 'surveillance' and 'control' (PASIAS and ROUSSAKIS, 2009). In this respect, one can pose a critical question: who marks the bench?

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