

La gente primero. Repensando las políticas educativas en tiempos de crisis utilizando el enfoque de capacidades

People first. Rethinking educational policies in times of crisis using the capability approach¹

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Resumen

En el sector educativo público español existe una gran preocupación y malestar que se está traduciendo en numerosos actos de protesta. Las razones para esto tienen sus raíces, primeramente, en los sucesivos recortes presupuestarios en educación que vienen sucediendo desde 2010 y, en segundo lugar, en las medidas políticas y legislativas que se están tomando.

Aquí queremos analizar los cambios que están ocurriendo y las consecuencias de cada uno de ellos utilizando el enfoque de capacidades en desarrollo humano. Este enfoque nos permite poner a la gente en el centro y evidenciar, de forma crítica, las consecuencias injustas de las políticas educativas que se están adoptando y posibles alternativas a ellas fundamentadas sobre un modelo distinto de desarrollo.

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Palabras clave: políticas educativas, capacidades, desarrollo humano, crisis económica.

Abstract

Within the Spanish public education sector there is a deep concern and unease that is resulting in a number of acts of protest. The reasons for this have their roots, firstly, in the successive budget cuts in education that have been occurring since 2010 and, secondly, in the political and legislative measures that are being taken.

We wish to analyse the changes that are occurring and the consequences of each one of them using the capabilities approach to human development. This approach allows us to put people at the centre and evince, in a critical way, the unfair consequences of the educational policies that are being adopted, and possible alternatives to them founded on a different model of development.

Key Words: education, policies, capabilities, human development, economic crises.

1. Introduction

Within the Spanish public education sector there is a deep concern and unease that is resulting in a number of acts of protest: demonstrations, sit-ins in educational establishments, rallies, strikes, etc. - which have been more or less regular for several months.

The reasons for this widespread unease and anxiety have their roots, firstly, in the successive budget cuts in education that have been occurring since 2010 and, secondly, in the political and legislative measures that are being taken, such as the changes to the *Ley Orgánica de la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa* (Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality, hereafter LOMCE).

In this paper we wish to analyse the changes that are occurring and the consequences of each one of them using the capabilities approach to human development (hereafter CA). This approach allows us to put people at the centre and evince, in a critical way, the unfair consequences of the educational policies that are being adopted, and possible alternatives to them founded on a different model of development.

The paper is organised in the following way: in the next section we will introduce the most relevant contributions the CA makes on education followed, in the second section, by a discussion of the main elements that make up the idea of citizenship of CA. We wanted to include this element because it is particularly relevant to the analysis of the current Spanish educational context where, amongst other measures, the subject of Education for Citizenship has been removed from the curriculum following the LOMCE reform. In the third section we describe the measures taken by the Spanish Government since 2010 under budget cuts due to the economic crisis. We will also see the social response to such measures and the arguments being presented. The fourth section encompasses an analysis of the measures from the perspective of CA and the fifth ends with the most important conclusions and recommendations for educational policies in times of crisis.

2. Capability approach and education

As Sen states, capabilities are the real possibilities and opportunities of leading a life which a person has reason to value and refer to different combinations of functions which can be achieved, where functions are 'the different things that a person can value doing or being' (Sen 1999a: 3). These beings and doings together constitute what makes a person's life valuable. The distinction between achieved functionings and capabilities is between the realised and the effectively possible, in other words, between achievements on the one hand, and freedoms or valuable options from which one can choose on the other (Robeyns, 2005). Thus, for a society to develop, the main sources of freedom deprivations must be reduced and eliminated.

Mc Cowan and Unterhalter (2013: 143) suggest two main ways in which capabilities have a bearing on education: 1) relating to the distributional aspect of education and 2) its substantive values and content.

With regard to *equality*, they argue that the general position on equality taken by the capability approach can be applied to educational settings. "Just as the approach rejects an emphasis on equality of initial resources or of preference satisfaction, so it rejects in education an approach of equal treatment or equal attainment regardless of individual or group differences" (Mc Cowan and Unterhalter, 2013: 143). This has to do with the concept of conversion factors, which are personal, social and environmental characteristics that intersect thorough different dimensions. Learners could differ along (a) a personal axis (e.g. gender, age, class, etc); (b) along an intersecting external of environmental axis (wealth, climate, etc.) and (c) along an inter-individual or social axis (Walker, 2006). Additionally, pupils with the same outcome may have had very different opportunities, so cannot be judged in the same manner (Unterhalter et al, 2007).

Consequently, as Unterhalter points out, thinking in terms of capabilities raises a wider range of issues than simply looking at the amount of resources or commodities people have. Because of interpersonal diversity, people need a different amount of resources in order to transform them into the functioning 'being educated' (Unterhalter, 2009: 166).

The second contribution of CA, *substantive values and content*, refers, firstly, to the “*capability multiplier*” role of education. Education can develop abilities that relate to specific areas can open up a wider set of opportunities, in terms of employment, leisure and so forth (Saito, 2003: 27). Some of the opportunities enabled by education are derived from the certification provided by formal education, and some from learning itself, which can be gained from a wide variety of educational experiences (Mc Cowan and Unterhalter, 2013: 146).

Secondly, capabilities can have implications for *curriculum and pedagogies*. In this aspect, capabilities approach in education has strong links with other progressive educational ideas of Rousseau, Dewey and Freire (Flores Crespo, 2007). These approaches and CA have in common concerns with the voices of those who have to struggle to be heard and included. Also, they have concerns with human flourishing and how equality and social arrangements have to change. When we teach CA, we therefore need to keep in mind that our pedagogy ought to be consistent with the core principles of the approach itself. It ought to be both a critical and humanising pedagogy (Walker, 2009: 264).

The last contribution of CA to education has to do with *values*. It is not just that education should promote particular political and moral values, but that it is inescapably charged with those values (Mc Cowan and Unterhalter, 2013: 148). Which values are at the core of CA? We argue that, as CA is related with human development thinking, the core values of this idea of development are at the core of CA. The UNDP’s standard definition of the central dimensions of human development includes: empowerment, meaning the expansion of capabilities (ability to attain valued ends), expansion of valued functionings (attained valued ends), and participation (sharing in specifying priorities); equity in distribution of basic capabilities, and, security and sustainability of people’s valued attainments and opportunities (Boni and Gasper, 2012).

3. Capability and citizenship

We would like to address three other important elements of CA that are extremely valuable to understanding the meaning and role of education for citizenship. According to McCowan and Unterhalter (2013: 138) the contribution of CA to citizenship relates primarily to three aspects: *deliberation, the acknowledgement of heterogeneity, and the emphasis on agency*. CA justifies the desirability of democracy as a form of government and mechanism for people to rule themselves due to three values: the intrinsic, the instrumental and the constructive value (Sen, 1999b). Firstly, democracy is a good in itself, and must be upheld even if there appear to be other more pressing needs (such as nutrition). Secondly, democracy has instrumental value in terms of enabling populations to secure, for example, economic and social rights. Lastly, democracy has a constructive function in the sense of allowing for the development of shared values in a society, such as tolerance or equity (McCowan and Unterhalter, 2013: 138). Not that democracy is the only place where values are constructed; social values are similarly constructed by the advertising industry, the media, or religious organisations, for example. Nevertheless, democracy is the mechanism through which these different sets of values are debated in the public space so that a consensus can be built around a government's policy priorities (Deneulin, 2009: 150). Further, it is around public deliberation where learning takes place.

To have the space for public discussion, it is important to assure space for *diversity*. Homogenising forms of citizenship are dangerous in that they can suppress forms of difference that may be valued by the individuals or groups in question, but also because they may ignore disparities in people's ability to exercise the formal rights granted to them (McCowan and Unterhalter, 2013: 139).

Another central concept in CA is *agency*, defined as the ability to act according to what one values or –in Sen's words- 'what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important' (Sen, 1985: 206). Consequently, 'people who enjoy high levels of agency are engaged in actions that are congruent with their values' (Alkire, 2007: 3) and this becomes an essential aspect in the effective realisation of capabilities. Two elements of agency are

especially important to enhance capabilities and pursue human development goals: *reflexivity and responsibility* (Boni and Walker, 2013). On one side, critical reflexivity and Freire's conscious awareness of being an agent become relevant in the framework of collective action. In this regard, deliberation and reflective dialogue become core elements for developing agency (Crocker, 2008: 11). There must be a certain reflection and conscious deliberation of the reasons and values upholding agency: 'what is needed is not merely freedom and power to act, but also freedom and power to question and reassess the prevailing norms and values' (Dreze and Sen, 2002: 258). The second element is the responsibility towards others. Ballet et al (2007) propose to broaden Sen's concept of agency by considering responsibility as a constitutive characteristic of the person at the same level as freedom. This has important consequences as it generates a distinction between *weak and strong agency*. While weak agency would refer solely to developing individual goals and capabilities, strong agency would include the exercise of responsibility towards others' capabilities and society as a whole.

We would like to finish this section with a brief comment on the similarities and concerns that CA shares with other educational proposal, particularly the broad family of critical pedagogies. Both of them are grounded in values related with, broadly speaking, social justice and are committed with a democratic understanding of public life. Critical pedagogies are good in placing power at the centre of analysis while CA is paying special attention to diversity. Is out of the scope of this paper go further in this analysis²; but, what we can remark is, from both approaches, many voices are raising a strong concern against the way in which mainstreaming views of education (personified in the Spanish case) are shaping curriculum and educational arrangements.

² To deepen in a comparison of both approaches related with curriculum you can see Walker (2009).

4. The Spanish educational context. Three years of “unavoidable” measures³

4.1. The “unavoidable” measures to address the economic crisis

In Spain, since 2010, public spending budgets have declined steadily in areas that are particularly sensitive for citizens, such as health, education, benefits, social spending, etc. These reductions have intensified as the economic and financial crisis has become more evident and pleas have been made, from the state, for the “unavoidable” need to limit public spending and reduce Spain's debt.

Specifically, public investment in education that had been increasing gradually up until 2010, when it reached 4.9% of GDP, has been declining since then. Thus, recent comparative data on total education spending in relation GDP affirms that in 2011 the average for the EU-27 was 5.34%, while in Spain it was 4.74% (EUROSTAT, 2013). If we take into account various news stories that have appeared in the media recently, we can see a noticeable difference in the educational budget, which has decreased from 3,902 million Euros in 2010 to 1,945 million Euros for 2013⁴.

³ This section has been written with the evidences raised through a documentary research conducted from the beginning of 2010 until august 2013. We have analyzed different sources: general newspapers, official documents of EU, OCDE and the Spanish Government, Spanish educational laws, official statements of educational trade unions, students, parents and teacher associations, universities bodies, etc. In all this process we have tried to capture all perspectives, from the ones closest to the official approaches to the critical ones.

⁴ Source INE (National Statistical Institute) quoted in El Mundo newspaper: <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2012/graficos/mar/s5/presupuestos.html>

In April 2012, the government approved *Real Decreto Ley 14/2012* (Royal Decree-Law 14/2012) on urgent measures to streamline public spending on education⁵. Some of the most controversial measures have been: 1) The 20% increase in the maximum number of students per class, and 2) The increase in teaching hours for teachers, with a minimum of 25 hours for primary teachers and 20 hours for other teaching areas.

Parents' associations have differed in their opinions on the consequences these measures will have on education. The CEAPA, mainly involved with state schools, believes that increased teaching hours will be “at the expense” of other educational activities, such as tutoring, exam preparation or planning lessons, and the increased student/teacher ratio in compulsory education will mean that not all students will receive adequate attention, given the “heterogeneity” of the students. However, for COFAPA, mainly present in semi-private education (private entities that provide educational services), the plan presented by the Minister of Education, Wert, aims to “increase the efficiency” of the management of resources, and the further teaching hours for teachers “will strengthen” the basic or fundamental subjects.

In the case of universities, one of the most controversial measures has been the revision of tuition fees, bringing the price closer to their actual cost, and the inclusion of academic performance criteria. The application of this measure, which varies significantly according to decisions made in each Autonomous Region, ranges from maintaining the rates, or increasing them commensurate with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) - the average rate of CPI was 2.4% in 2012 (INE, 2013⁶) - to increases of up to 67% for the first registration fee⁷.

In addition, the General State Budget for 2013 sees a 3.8% reduction in scholarships and grants for students, which include general aid for university and other students,

⁵http://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/ConsejodeMinistros/Referencias/_2012/refc20120420.htm#GastoPublico and Boletín Oficial del Estado, 96, 21th April 2012, pp. 30977-30984

<http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2012/04/21/pdfs/BOE-A-2012-5337.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.ine.es/daco/daco42/daco421/ipc0012.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.20minutos.es/noticia/1539986/0/universidad/subida-tasas/congelacion/>

grants for learning foreign languages and compensation for tuition costs for universities, as well as a freeze on research grants⁸.

As would be expected, these measures have incited strong reactions in the university education sector. For example, one of the main trade unions⁹ recounts that, in Spain, investment in scholarships and grants in relation to GDP is one of the lowest in the OECD and in 2009 accounted for 0.11% of GDP compared to 0.29% as the OECD average¹⁰.

The OECD itself (2013) has voiced its criticisms of this measure, arguing that “higher rates increase resources in universities, [...] but they can restrict access to university to students with fewer resources if a public support system to help pay for or reimburse study costs is lacking. Additionally, if you have a labour market that does not offer sufficient employment opportunities, as is the case in Spain, high tuition fees discourage young students from choosing subjects that require long periods of study, so they enter the labour market earlier on, and at a disadvantage”.

Even clearer criticism comes from the university professors Hernández Armenteros and Pérez García, experts in college funding. In a recent article in the press these authors estimated that the upward revision of qualifications for access to university education in order to obtain a grant, from 5 to 5.5 points and to 6.5 points in the academic years of 2012/13 and 2013/14 respectively, would mean that 6.75% of grant students would lose that status¹¹.

For its part, the Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities, under no suspicion of harbouring partisan interests, in a statement from June 2013, rejects the amendments to the scholarship system¹² and proposes to the Ministry of Education

⁸ <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2012/09/29/espana/1348917473.html#comentarios>

⁹ <http://www.csi-f.es/es/content/ceuta-%E2%96%BA-csi-f-exige-que-el-sistema-de-becas-sirva-para-posibilitar-el-acceso-los-estudios-to>

¹⁰ <http://www.dudasbecasmec.com/2013/07/el-presupuesto-destinado-becas-en.html>

¹¹ http://sociedad.elpais.com/sociedad/2012/09/14/actualidad/1347651082_329134.html

¹² http://www.crue.org/doc_portada/Junio_2013/2013.06.27_Comunicado_RD_Becas.pdf

that the only requirement be that of income. “The application of the new academic requirements, along with changes to the model of allocating funds, could lead to exclusion and have the effect of deterring students from accessing and continuing in higher education”. They also consider that this measure “acts against the groups that are most vulnerable and at risk of exclusion.” They add that: “these grants, which are an instrument of integration and social advancement, should not be mixed or confused with scholarships for academic excellence.”

4.2. The Tides of Citizens

Amongst the various groups that have spoken out clearly against the measures, the most notable are the social movements and protest groups formed by professionals and citizens denouncing their loss of rights.

According to Jaime Pastor¹³, professor of Political Science and an expert on social movements, the 15M group, which arose in May 2011 as a public outcry against the consequences of the economic crisis, the social cuts and as a criticism of the way politicians go about their politics, influenced and had a “contagious” effect on other movements such as the “*Marea Verde*”¹⁴ (the *Green Tide*, professionals from the educational sector), the “*Marea Blanca*” (*White Tide*, of health sector workers) or the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (a protest group for those affected by mortgages), amongst others.

In the education sector, the *Green Tide* social movement, whose motto is “state schools are ours, and for everyone”, arose in mid-2011 as a protest group that brought together professionals from non-university education in the Community of Madrid. Primarily, they rejected the decision not to renew the contracts of more than 3,000 temporary teachers for the 2011-2012 academic year, as a result of the two-hour increase in teaching time for other teachers. For the protest group, the measure

¹³ <http://www.abc.es/videos-sociedad/20130515/profesor-ciencias-politicas-destaca-2383151960001.html>

¹⁴ Green is the color of the t-shirts of this social movement

signified a reduction in the quality of teaching since it contributed to increasing teacher workload, making it impossible to dedicate time to the tasks of tutoring and student services, maintenance of computer equipment or services such as the school library or laboratory practice.

To this were added other measures, such as a 5% pay cut for teachers in May 2010¹⁵, and subsequent pay cuts that included the loss of two months additional pay and other bonuses. In total, it is estimated that these measures have together brought about a 20% loss in teachers' purchasing power over the last three years (FETE-UGT, 2013).

The group organises various protest actions (school sit-ins, demonstrations, strike days, etc.) against budget cuts in public education by the central and regional governments. This social movement has continued to spread throughout the country, with numerous initiatives and associations being created - such as *Plataforma Estatal por la Escuela Pública* (National Platform for State Schools), *Mejora tu Escuela Pública* (Improve your State School), *Soy Pública*, (I'm state), etc. - at regional and national levels, which have made the *Green Tide* a symbol of the protests in education.

In this wave of protests, those with the greatest impact were the two general strikes in the public education sector at all levels - from infant to university - backed by the entire teaching community, one in May 2012 whose central motive was the rejection of the measures contained in the Royal Decree Law 14/2012, discussed earlier, and a second in May 2013 in reaction to the implementation of a new act on education that we will look at in the next section.

4.3. The new Law to Reform the Quality of Education (LOMCE)

¹⁵ *Real Decreto-ley 8/2010, de 20 de mayo, por el que se adoptan medidas extraordinarias para la reducción del déficit público.* <http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2010/05/24/pdfs/BOE-A-2010-8228.pdf>

With this title, on May 17, 2013 the current Spanish government approved the LOMCE project as a reform to the previous *Ley Orgánica de Educación* (Organic Law on Education, LOE, 2006)¹⁶. According to The Ministry of Education, “the approval of this bill is justified by objective data provided by all the international studies, which demonstrate that education in Spain is in urgent need of reform”. This Bill is currently before Parliament but, owing to the absolute majority of the party in government, it is expected that it will be approved without problems.

The initial explanatory memorandum for the act clearly states the proposed educational model:

“Education is the driving force that promotes the wellbeing of a country; the educational level of its citizens determines its ability to compete successfully on an international level (...) Improving the level of education of our citizens means opening the doors to highly skilled jobs, representing a commitment to economic growth and a better future”

According to the educational sector and protest groups, this definition of education, “is mercantilist, as it understands [education] as dependent on economic processes” (*Soy Pública*, 2012¹⁷), with a focus on results in a way which means it “places the needs of the markets over the entire education of our children, and the building of a fairer and more cohesive society” (*Stop Ley Wert*, *Stop Wert's Law*, 2012¹⁸).

In contrast, the preamble of the current LOE (approved under the previous government in 2006) states:

“[...] Education is the means of transmitting and at the same time, renewing culture and the wealth of knowledge and values that underpin it, of extracting the maximum potential from their sources of wealth, of fostering a democratic society and respect for individual differences, of promoting solidarity and avoiding discrimination, with the ultimate goal of achieving the necessary social cohesion. Moreover, education is the best means of guaranteeing the

¹⁶ <http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2006/05/04/pdfs/A17158-17207.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://soypublica.wordpress.com/2012/10/08/lo-que-esconde-la-lomce-analisis-del-anteproyecto-de-ley-de-educacion/>

¹⁸ <https://www.yoestudieenlapublica.org/stopvers.php>

operation of a democratic, responsible, free and critical citizenship, which is indispensable for the creation of advanced, dynamic and just societies” (LOE, 2006).

Even though the LOMCE also states that: “In the individual sphere [education] means facilitating personal development and social integration [...] learning in school should be directed at training individuals to be autonomous, critical, and able to think for themselves” the spirit of the reform focuses on training and the development of skills to train skilled, occupationally competitive workers, very much in line with the guidelines of the European Commission (2012)¹⁹.

As for the streamlining of the educational curriculum, by emphasising fundamental subjects, the current education act sees the disappearance of subjects such as music, visual and plastic arts and art education as compulsory, for both primary and secondary schooling. In relation to this, the Council of State, the supreme advisory body of the Government of Spain, ruled that: “it would be advisable, even when these subjects are made optional, that it remain mandatory for education authorities to provide this option”.

One of the most controversial aspects of the new law has been the removal of the controversial subject “Education for Citizenship and Human Rights”, whose elimination was demanded by conservative and Catholic associations and groups of parents and teachers, since, according to the Minister of Education himself, it “indoctrinated” and dealt with “controversial issues”.

This supposed “indoctrination” has been challenged by a recent judgment of the Supreme Court²⁰, which states that “its content is not a harmful indoctrination of fundamental rights, nor does it infringe on ideological or religious freedom, nor the rights of parents that their children receive religious and moral education according to their convictions.”

¹⁹ European Commission, 2012: Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes COM (2012), 669, in http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/com669_en.pdf

²⁰ Supreme Court, Sentence 12th November 2012.

For its part, since 1997 the Council of Europe has been promoting and recommending that EU countries include Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights in their education policies. In particular, the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education notes that “education for democratic citizenship [...] should be a priority in the reform and implementation of educational policies”²¹ and be included “in formal education programs at infant, primary and secondary levels of education, as well as in general education and training” (Council of Europe, 2010)²². Given that Spain has signed these recommendations, the State Council²³ proposes to: “proceed to impose them as mandatory [on the curriculum] at some time”.

The same view has been expressed by the European Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils Muiznieks²⁴, who criticised the elimination of this subject as, in his opinion, “there are no reliable reports or analyses that consider that Citizenship Education is politicised”, as political associations and groups argue.

Despite all this, it appears that this subject will indeed be eliminated. In its place will be the subjects of “*Social and Civic Values*”, for primary education, and “*Ethical Values*”, for secondary education, as alternatives to “*Religion*”, which under this law will remain a part of both curriculums, mandatorily offered by centres and a voluntary option for students.

For the State Council²⁵ “the change in the model of religious education emerges on the occasion of regulating the various educational stages, the organisation of which

²¹ Unión Europea, 2002. Recomendación del Comité de Ministros a los Estados miembros sobre la Educación para la Ciudadanía Democrática. Recogido en A. Bolívar, 2008, *Ciudadanía y competencias básicas*. Sevilla: Fundación ECOEM, pp. 265-274.

²² Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship CM/Rec(2010)7 <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1621697>

²³ State Council (Consejo de Estado), 2013. Dictamen 172/2013 (Anteproyecto de ley orgánica para la mejora de la calidad educativa) http://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?coleccion=consejo_estado&id=2013-172

²⁴ <http://www.abc.es/sociedad/20130607/abci-educacion-ciudadania-europa-201306071908.html>

²⁵ *Ibídem*

represents a step backwards from the current situation. It is given more importance, [the subject of religion] given a timetable similar to other subjects in primary and secondary education, where it is set as a specific fixed subject with an alternative option.”

5. Scrutinising Spanish educational policies using the capability approach

In the preceding pages we have described the type of educational policies that are being implemented in the Spanish system and the strong social response that most of them are receiving from a wide variety of sectors. In this section we examine these measures using CA as a key to understanding the chain of events in Spain. In order to do so we return to what was set forth in sections 2 and 3. Firstly, we will look at the distributional aspect of education and the values of contents of CA. Following that, we will refer to the idea of citizenship defended in CA as a means of analysing educational policy.

5.1. When inequalities and public deliberation are not in the educational agenda

One of the major characteristics that defines CA is its sensitivity and concern for diversity. People are different due to multiple factors: from their personal characteristics, their family histories and the social context in which they have grown and live. Diversity is good *per se* but may also limit people's choices. There may be cases in which people are at a disadvantage owing to a variety of social and personal factors, and these disadvantages can become “corrosive” where disadvantage in one specific field leads to an accumulation of disadvantages (Bonvin, 2013).

We argue that the measures being proposed in the Spanish context ignore this aspect. The main criterion is academic performance, in order to obtain a grant, to be

able to access a good school and university. Moreover, if the conditions of state schools (to which the most disadvantaged students normally have access) deteriorate, it is expected that the people who have most difficulty following the course will abandon their studies. This is especially egregious since, according to the latest results released by EUROSTAT²⁶, Spain leads EU figures for dropout rates (not finishing compulsory education) with a rate of 24.9% in 2012, a rate that is declining, yet still very far from the current European average (12.8%) and the 10% target set for 2020.

The statement from of the Minister of Education, claiming that the changes will not lessen the quality of the system, as Spanish education “is not a problem of resources”, doesn’t consider that different learners need different resources and measures that expand their opportunities to have the life they have reason to value. As described in the previous section, there are many voices that are pointing out the tremendous inequality in educational measures (unions, teachers, civil groups, students, rectors, etc.). Only a small sector, aligned with private and religious education, approves the suitability of these measures. Unfortunately, the economic crisis is the perfect excuse for eliminating deliberation and public reasoning - the essence of democracy and fundamental pillars of CA.

5.2. Restricting the beneficial effects of the capability to be educated

The second question has to do with education as a multiplier of other capabilities. If access to education is limited, if you eliminate measures to support struggling students, young people's options for expanding their capabilities will be clearly reduced. This concerns access to the labour market, but also many other aspects of life that are related to education and that have to do with social and political participation, with leisure, with understanding, etc. As Sen (1992) notes, there are three ways in which education enhances freedom. First, education fulfils an

²⁶ http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-GL-13-002/EN/KS-GL-13-002-EN.PDF

instrumental social role. Literacy can foster public debate and dialogue about social and political arrangements, for example. Education also has an *instrumental process role* in facilitating our capacity to participate in decision-making processes at the household, community or national level. Finally, it has an *empowering and distributive role* in facilitating the ability of disadvantaged, marginalised and excluded groups to organise politically. Therefore, hindering access to education for disadvantaged groups involves limiting their capability to participate on multiple levels and decreases their options to be agents of change. Once again, inequitable educational policies condemn people with fewer resources to be second or third degree citizens.

5.3. Instrumental competences versus capabilities

Another clear direction that the Spanish educational reform is taking is the focus on instrumental skills at the expense of other types of content and abilities. On another occasion we have referred in detail to the differences between capabilities and competences (Lozano et al, 2012) demonstrating that they are radically different concepts in meaning, origin and implications for education. We cannot enter into this discussion now, but it is important to stress that this educational reform is clearly in contrast to a curriculum inspired by CA. Subjects such as art, music, etc. will cease to be obligatory, in order to strengthen the emphasis on fundamental subjects. The subject of citizenship education is replaced by religion or civic and ethical values. We have no objections to the teaching of ethics in school, but removing the reference to citizenship from the curriculum (contrary to the proposals of the Council of Europe and the Council of State, as we have seen) in order to ensure that all students can opt to study religion or, if not to their liking, study ethics, seems to us a clear sign of a conservative step backwards, which goes far beyond economic cutbacks. As we saw above, when analysing the pedagogical approaches that underpin CA (which are based on critical pedagogies) having knowledge and getting a critically-oriented education are crucial components in forming a good life plan with genuine choices

(Walker, 2009). The citizenship education course, although it did not *per se* guarantee the acquisition of critical thinking, was an important step in this direction.

What to say, therefore, of the values that underlie current educational policies? If we mentioned before that the core values of human development were equity, participation and empowerment and sustainability, to which must be added the many references we have made to the promotion of diversity, we can reasonably argue that current educational policies are the polar opposite of a pro-human development policy. The educational policies proposed by Minister Wert seem solely set on competitiveness, excellence, academic achievement, and certain Catholic values. Although the focus of human development and CA is not opposed to economic growth and productivity as central elements of development (UNDP, 1990), it understands them in relation to other values. There can be no growth without equity, without sustainability, without participation and diversity. These precepts in no way inspire the current educational policies.

5.4. Agency and participation. Tides for re-imagining politics?

We devote this last section to speak of agency, one of the constituent elements of CA. Previously, we argued that the educational policies being proposed are far removed from having an interest in promoting agents of change. However, in recent years, never before has there been so much social mobilisation in Spain. In particular, in the field of education, we have referred to the *Green Tide*, to the *Plataforma Estatal por la Escuela Pública* (National Platform for State Schools), to *Mejora tu Escuela Pública* (Improve Your State School) or *Soy Pública* (I'm State). All of these are clearly opposed to the current educational policies and aligned with the principles of CA. It is true that at the outset they arose as a means of defending the interests of the groups affected by education cuts but, over time, their demands have focused on equity in access to education, equal opportunities, etc. Also notable is the wide participation of young people, and not just university students, in these protests. One of the most striking episodes was the protest by the young people from the *Instituto Juan Luis Vives* secondary school in Valencia, in February 2012, against the

deterioration of the educational facilities of the school due to defaulted payments and cuts made by the regional government. The protest ended with a strong police repression that had wide media coverage²⁷.

If agency is participating in change, even at the cost of reducing capabilities as the episode from Valencia (renamed the Valencian Spring) shows, then we can argue that in Spain, probably in response to the educational policy, we are witnessing a flourishing of the agency we have earlier called *strong agency*. It is beyond the purpose of this paper to delve into the reasons, the individual stories, that lead these young people and those involved in the tides to exercise their agency²⁸. However, we can say that there are clear indications that a strong agency is being built, both individually as well as collectively. The protest groups and rallies, the symbolic gestures, such as when a group of distinguished university students attended the awards ceremony to receive their awards for academic excellence wearing *Green Tide* T-shirts and refused to shake hands with the Minister of Education²⁹, are examples of this.

6. Conclusions and some reflections for the future

Throughout this article we have argued that the educational policies being pushed forward by the Spanish central government are contrary to the approach of CA. There is no specific consideration of diversity, there is no value placed on the various effects that education can have as an instrument to promote greater equity and redistribution, its purpose is not to train students for participation in public life, subjects such as music or the arts have lost status and are no longer considered

²⁷ See <http://www.publico.es/espana/423063/repression-policial-en-valencia-contra-las-manifestaciones-de-estudiantes> and <http://www.20minutos.es/noticia/1315142/0/claves-protestas/estudiantes-policia/valencia/>

²⁸ This question is being researched in the framework of a European Project named SOCIETY. See <http://www.society-youth.eu/> for more information

²⁹ See http://sociedad.elpais.com/sociedad/2013/06/04/actualidad/1370360158_098309.html

fundamental, and themes such as citizenship education have been removed from the curriculum, deemed as “indoctrination”. On the other hand, the manner of designing and implementing these policies has not generated consensus and has received little support. It is true that educational reforms have always been controversial in Spain but, as we have argued above, there has never before been such opposition from the citizenry as now.

We would like to end this article with a constructive tone, by outlining some thoughts on how CA can contribute to design educational policies.

The first question is to recover the *constructive* value of democracy (Sen, 1999b), the public arena as a space for discussion and the search for formulas that permit widely supported measures to be adopted. In this deliberative process it should be ensured that all voices are heard, including those less powerful groups with fewer opportunities, such as students with less access to educational opportunities.

Secondly, and also given the critical situation being experienced Spain where youth poverty is very high (with a rate of 30.6% compared to 27% of adults), with an unemployment rate of 55.13% (both according to Red Cross estimates, 2013), access to quality education is crucial. Quality is not just resources, it also means attending to students' diversity and giving them real opportunities to make their right to education effective

Thirdly, it is important to emphasise that the acquisition of instrumental skills must go hand in hand with the cultivation of other capabilities. This also includes the use of critical pedagogies that demonstrate the best option for cultivating these capabilities (Walker, 2006). Religion, or rather religions, can contribute to this, but should not replace other training processes guided by values such as those mentioned above.

Furthermore, in relation to the cultivation of agency, an education policy based on the principles of CA should develop a citizenry that is critical, demanding and which promotes change, not a passive citizenry that merely obeys the decisions that come from above. In our opinion, what these tides of citizens are demonstrating is that this type of citizenship is a reality in Spain. It may not be a majority, but it exists. This, beyond the short-term decisions of politicians, focused on current circumstances, is the best hope that a change in education policy is possible.

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