

Theory and Texts of Educational Policy: Possibilities and Constraints

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Abstract In our paper we aim at reflecting upon the extent to which educational theory may be used as a framework in the analysis of policy documents. As policy texts are ‘heteroglossic in character’ (Lingard and Ozga, in *The Routledge Falmer reader in education policy and politics*, Routledge, London and New York, 2007, p. 2) and create “circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed” (Ball in, *Education policy and social class: The selected works of Stephen J Ball*, Routledge, London and New York, 2006, p. 46), they need to be theoretically tackled in their underlying assumptions and implications. This proposal draws on an analysis of two sets of documents of the European Union: texts produced between 2000 and 2006, underlying the European Union programmes; and texts produced by a working group focusing on the key competences of Lifelong Learning (2003–2006). Initially, the framework for the analysis of different documents was grounded on the existing research in the field of educational policy. Now we attempt a secondary analysis of the collected data by transposing the borders of this particular and highly prolific field. We argue that what is *outside* the texts may reshape what is *inside* the texts. Educational theory allows us to define some conceptual tools in order to question the documents as political apparatus which open and constrain possibilities. Therefore, we will use educational theory as an arena where different matters, perspectives and possibilities may be explored and assembled. We have engaged in a conversation with both the data and some theoretical approaches. Central to this conversation are the concepts of “ignorant schoolmaster” (Rancière, in *The ignorant schoolmaster five lessons in intellectual emancipation*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1991), “learning contexts” (Edwards, in *Rethinking contexts*

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for learning and teaching, Routledge, Oxon and New York, 2009a, b), and “experience” (Larrosa, in *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, 19:20–28, 2002).

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The Contribution of Educational Theory for Interpreting Policy Texts

Lifelong learners are people that, in an early stage of life, become competent in several domains of responsible living in a society of knowledge and progress. They are very good communicators, both in their mother tongue as in foreign languages. They are always willing to learn new things and so they dominate internal and external resources of learning and collecting information and knowledge. In this way, they are undoubtedly sensible to cultural issues and means of expression. In more specific terms, these people are highly competent in nuclear contemporary domains of knowledge and development, such as Mathematics, Sciences and Technology, especially digital technologies.

With all these characteristics, they have everything it takes to succeed, and so they risk innovating and having strong entrepreneurship. (Alves et al. 2010)

On Educational Theory

First Assumption

Within educational theory, it is possible to identify four different kinds of problems or research programmes: *epistemological*, i.e. the possibility and organization of knowledge; *anthropological*, i.e. the human character of education; *sociological*, i.e. the dominant social structures, beliefs and values; and *systematic*, i.e. the relation between the different dimensions of education which should underlie the structure of educational systems and practices. By considering these approaches as interconnected, we argue that they may offer some contributions for the analysis of the emergent perspectives about lifelong learning within the policy texts we have analysed:

- Every educational system, programme, proposal or discourse is organised around a perspective on the nature and organization of knowledge, as well as on assumptions about the best way to reach certain educational goals in order to promote learning;
- Every educational system, programme, proposal or discourse conveys conceptions about the human subject (the learner) as well as associated perspectives about teaching and learning;
- Every educational system, programme, proposal or discourse is framed within broader social structures, power relations, beliefs and values that affect its own dynamics;
- Every educational system, programme, proposal or discourse represents a systematic outcome of the epistemological, anthropological and sociological dimensions so that educational systems and practices acquire meaning within a specific space and time.

Considering these four dimensions, we argue that the policy texts about lifelong learning are embedded in epistemological, anthropological and sociological assumptions, and are of a systematic nature.

Second Assumption

In the last decades of the twentieth century, educational theory was dominated by the critical theories that have explored relations between education and economics, politics and culture (reproduction theory), or the individuals' emancipation from the positivistic mentality as well as from social and political constraints (emancipatory theory). These critical theories placed every educational phenomenon at the crossroads of economic, historical, cultural and political factors (Martínez Bonafé 1996). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we have seen a re-conceptualization of critical theory by different authors (Lather 1992; Latour 2006; Rancière 2008) who, as critics of critical theories, are trying to rethink the role of the critic in educational theory. According to Latour, "The critic is not the one who debunks but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of naïve believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather" (Latour 2006, p. 37).

In this paper, we aim at reflecting upon the extent to which educational theory may be used as a framework for the analysis of policy documents. As policy texts are "heteroglossic in character" (Lingard and Ozga 2007, p. 2) and create "circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed" (Ball 2006, p. 46), they need to be theoretically tackled in their underlying assumptions and implications.

Understood as such, the contribution of educational theory in this particular matter may be to present an arena where different matters, perspectives and possibilities may be explored and assembled—and materialised as matters of interest. Educational theory allows us to define conceptual tools to question the documents as political apparatus which open and constrain possibilities. We have analysed the policy documents in order to question the obvious and to expand the possible (Larrosa 1999). We question how and to what extent these texts constrain or open possibilities beyond what is already predicted, thought, read, and said.

Reading Exercises

We present a theoretical exercise consisting of a secondary analysis approach to data collected in a previously developed research project.¹ The project was about European educational policy, and took into account different levels of analysis of European policies and lifelong learning (LLL)—from the supranational to the individual. Regarding the supranational level, the project considered twenty major European policy documents (see "Appendix"), as follows:

Group A: a set of eight documents produced by the working group that reflected upon the key competences for LLL between 2003 and 2006. These documents include: five reports of the working group within the implementations of the programme "Education and Training 2010"; one proposal for a recommendation; one opinion of the Regions Committee about the proposal for recommendation; and the recommendation of the European Parliament and Council itself on the key competencies for LLL;

¹ This project was funded by the Portuguese Ministry of Science and Technology (reference: PTDC/CED/60425/2004) and was developed across the period 2007–2009. See <http://moodle.fct.unl.pt/course/view.php?id=1226>.

Group B: twelve documents produced by European institutions and bodies (commission, council, parliament) between 2000 and 2006. These documents include: three reports by the council of the EU; two decisions of the European Parliament and Council; three communications by the European Commission; the Memorandum on LLL; the Work Programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe; one resolution of the European Council; and one conclusion of a meeting of the council and representatives of the governments of the member-states about the efficiency and equity in education and training. This group of documents comprises different kinds of texts that are central for the understanding of the political framework of action programmes “Education and Training 2010” and “Lifelong Learning 2007–2013”. The decision to consider documents produced since 2000 was related to the reinforced role assumed by LLL and the educational policies following the European Lisbon Strategy. Considering that the research project about European Educational Policy was initiated in 2007, we analysed the documents previously produced.

The twenty documents were the object of content analysis developed according to a set of categories grounded on literature about lifelong learning and European policies. Alves et al. (2010) present the key conclusions of this analysis. They also shed light on difficulties in tracing the process of development of the documents, understanding the process of translating working papers into official ones, or becoming aware of the connections between different European Union papers. The selected documents result from several previous papers and opinions as well as different agendas and influences which are nearly impossible to trace and to relate. The connection between the working groups, the authors and the authority of the texts becomes even harder to understand. This finding brings to light an underlying dimension of the European Union way of influencing education policy that is seldom tackled. It concerns exercises of writing and reading.

This is the starting point of the theoretical exercise introduced in this paper: how do we read policy papers?

Deleuze (1995) defines two ways of reading. One is reading a book as if it was a kind of box, where the reader stays during the processes of reading and interpreting. This corresponds to a *conventional* way of reading in which the reader relates with the book as a kind of sacred document that bears within its true meaning. The reader’s role is to undertake an exegesis aiming to unveil the ‘essence’ of the text. This way of reading requires ‘expertise’ because the meaning of the text is encrypted. The *intensive* reading is the other option. It denies the search for the right interpretation and explanation of texts and books and, instead, relates the text to external aspects, meanings, and events:

“There are, you see, two ways of reading a book: you either see it as a box with something inside and start looking for what it signifies, and then if you’re even more perverse or depraved you set off after signifiers. (...) This second way of reading’s intensive: something comes through or it doesn’t. There’s nothing to explain, nothing to understand, nothing to interpret. It’s like plugging into an electric circuit. (...) This intensive way of reading, in contact with what’s outside the book, as a flow meeting other flows, one machine among others, as a series of experiments for each reader in the midst of events that have nothing to do with books, as tearing the book into pieces, getting it to interact with other things, absolutely anything ... is reading with love” (Deleuze 1995, p. 9).

Policy documents are usually understood as a kind of sacred documents that have a strong performative character once the reader understands their ‘true intention’. EU policy adds another ‘complication’ to the nature of the texts: the multiple layers of interpretation and

power at stake in geographical, organizational, and professional levels. In our first approach of the above-mentioned EU texts, we aimed at understanding their content by maintaining a close and closed perspective on the texts and following the threads from one document to the other. We followed the *conventional* way of reading. This was done by using content analysis with emergent categories, striving for a deep understanding of what was inside those policy texts. In what follows, we seek to produce a distance that allows us to look at the texts again, but this time from the outside.

Regarding the alternative way of reading, we attempt to develop an *intensive* reading of European Union major policy documents. By adopting this perspective, our option is to read the same documents as texts that overlap our common interests. We confront the texts with our actual concerns about educational phenomena.

In this paper, our option is to desacralize European Union texts. We performed this by reading them from a different point of view, other than the political framework of the original research project. In order to read these texts *with love* and connect them with what is *outside*, we ‘plugged’ them with a set of issues that we consider central within an educational perspective, thus both challenging and linking the analysed texts to contemporary issues of educational theory. We aim at tying the loose ends detected by the first approach: the ambiguous role of teachers, the demanding characteristics ascribed to European people, and the inability to imagine non-school places for intentional learning. In order to keep the validity of this ‘exercise of hope’, we examined the existing policy flaws in order to bring up new educational possibilities. Unlike conventional reading, which places readers in a ‘waiting position’ (e.g. for rules, for solutions), the *intensive* way of reading endorses alternative expectations. Beyond the rules established by conventional reading, we, as readers, regain hope in our educational actions: there is more to educational policy research than interpreting the original intention of documents or denouncing the eventual economical interests behind policies. Our text, like any other text, is an open text, therefore open to externality.

I think that the investigation of that power may prove more interesting and fruitful today than the endless task of unmasking the fetishes and the ghosts or the endless demonstration of the omnipotence of the beast. (Rancière 2008, p. 193)

Analysis

Guidelines for the Analysis

According to Falk’s (1999) argumentation, Lifelong Learning ‘sentences learners to life’ as well as to individualization. The collected evidences show that people in general—more than students—are the target audience of the policy documents. We *all* become lifelong learners. This may be connected with Rancière’s (1991) perspective on equality as the underlying principle for a pedagogical relation directed towards intellectual emancipation. We will address the idea that that same sentence also refers to teachers.

The concept of learning context also becomes diffuse. The current paradoxical trend to ‘pedagogicise’ the whole society, and consider learning as both lifelong and life-wide weakens the conceptual basis for talking specifically of learning contexts and processes. As Edwards (2009a, p. 3) stated, “Pedagogy has for some been defined as contained within the ‘spaces of enclosure’(...)”, while lifelong learning presents a disclosure of the educational contexts to the extent that every context becomes a potential learning context. Following

the same author (Edwards 2009a), we acknowledge that discourses of learning imply a decentring of learning contexts (for instance, home and workplace are included), whereas discourses of education tend to centre the learning contexts within institutional sites. In our perspective, the dominant and apparently self-evident discourse about the ‘pedagogicised’ society (Bernstein 2001) fosters the very masking/suppression of pedagogy. Without these ‘spaces of enclosure’ and the suspension of time required by pedagogy, the specificity of educational relationships as relations grounded on “the responsibility of the coming into presence of unique individual beings” (Biesta 2010, p. 91) is hindered.

Another issue we will consider is the type of relation between subject and knowledge, emerging in policy texts, that presents the lifelong learner as a kind of carrier of replaceable sets of competences. Larrosa (2002) considers that lifelong learning promotes the consumption of information thus hindering the subjective construction of knowledge. The ever-evolving nature of both knowledge and skills in order to achieve the desirable individual profile may function as a constraint to personal identity as it enables the paradoxical risk of becoming overqualified.

Considering this perspective, our analysis will be centred on the nature of the educational tasks found in the texts which comprise emerging questions about learning and teaching and their anchorage in life. We will focus on the following questions:

- a. Are the concepts of “student” and “teacher” erased within the broader concept of lifelong learner (Ranci re 1991)?
- b. Can learning contexts still be materialised? Do learning contexts still matter (Edwards 2009b)?
- c. Does lifelong learning constrain learning *for* life or learning as a life experience (Larrosa 2002)?

Through the debate on (1) the role and profile of “students” and “teachers”, (2) the materialization of learning contexts and (3) the connections between learning and living in contemporary societies, we argue that it is possible to focus our attention on the educational implications of the analysed policy texts. In fact, we think that any educational perspective must include the interaction between individuals (students, teachers, educators, learners, etc.), the contexts (within formal schooling, as well as informal and non-formal learning settings) and the knowledge central to every learning process (Alves and Azevedo 2010).

(Re)reading European Union Texts About Lifelong Learning

- a. Are the concepts of “student” and “teacher” erased within the broader concept of lifelong learner?

Subjects enrolled in LLL are reshaped by the texts we analysed in many, and not always coherent, senses—as previously described by Alves, Neves and Gomes (2010). The following excerpt from the Memorandum on LLL outlines the political ideal of a pedagogical relationship for LLL:

(...) **teachers and trainers become guides, mentors and mediators.** Their role – and it is a crucially important one – is to help and support learners who, as far as possible, take charge of their own learning. (...) The irreplaceable heart of the teaching role lies in nurturing precisely these human capacities to create and use knowledge. (p. 14)

The two sets of documents analysed respond differently to this promise of a new pedagogical relationship.

Documents from group B frequently refer to “people”, “teacher” and “trainer”, which makes possible the kind of relationship proposed. Underlying this assertion is the idea that teachers need not and cannot master knowledge or competencies in all the hypothetical fields of interest of students; rather, they must be competent in promoting the emergence of students’ capacities to make options concerning their learning path, ways to learn and use of knowledge. Rancière’s (1991) definition of an “ignorant schoolmaster” also dissociates the *savant* (knowing mind) from the master. Traditionally, being a knowing-mind or an expert would be a requirement for teaching, understood as explaining. “Before being the act of the pedagogue, explication is the myth of pedagogy, the parable of a world divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones, ripe minds and immature ones, the capable and the incapable, the intelligent and the stupid.” (Rancière 1991, p. 6). By shedding light on Jacotot’s intellectual adventure, Rancière dissects the myth of pedagogy as interweaving both the knowing and the ignorant minds, and shows how the master needs not to be a *savant* (knowing mind). Making the teacher understand that her/his job is not *explaining* knowledge or competencies, Rancière argues for the relevance of allowing students to learn from significant issues and works. This proposal seems to be apt to respond to the demands of the LLL policy documents without inhibiting teachers or pedagogical relationships. It is directed towards promoting the intellectual independence of students by building the relationship on the recognition of a certain equality of intelligence of students and teachers—equality in nature and capacity. The *ignorant schoolmaster’s* work would be to organise situations that would increase students’ *will* to learn and feed it with appropriate material and circumstances. *Ignorant* as (s)he is, the master should not previously determine what the learner is going to learn, but rather demand that the learners use their intelligence when facing specific situations. This “circle of power” culminates in the discursive exercise developed by students in order to understand their own learning, which is not determined by the teaching. In this way, the traditional hierarchical inequality between teacher and student would be eroded. Both teachers and students share the condition of being lifelong learners, although retaining distinctions in their specific roles. This approach allows inhibiting the suppression of pedagogy.

As to the key competences (group A documents), we concluded that, although this is a process highly dependent on the individual learner, some of the defined competences require the presence of a teacher as *savant*. On one hand, we agree with the arguments of different authors pointing out that LLL, as it has been conceived over the past 10 years, focuses the responsibility for learning excessively on the individual (Biesta 2005 and 2006). In the words of Biesta (2006, p. 169), “under the conditions of the learning economy lifelong learning itself has become understood as an individual task rather than as a collective project and this has transformed lifelong learning from a right to a duty”. Some of the defined competences correspond to school subject domains (e.g. mathematics, foreign languages), while others are transversal to the different subjects (e.g. digital competence, learning to learn). In this sense the set of eight competences is very heterogeneous and combines two different logics: (1) knowledge is organised according to traditional school subjects and (2) it is structured around transversal abilities and capacities. Additionally, the presentation of these key competences in a list, in which each one is branched into knowledge, skills and attitudes, can convey the idea that lifelong learning is after all a cumulative process of acquiring a previously defined set of knowledge. If this view prevails, there is no room for the unpredictability and uncertainty that is also enclosed

in every learning process and the teacher regains his/her central role of *savant* in predicting learning.

When looking for *spaces for hope*, we can return to the documents of group B and highlight the novelty introduced by mechanisms of recognition of prior learning, which again require an *ignorant schoolmaster* unable to predict learning that has already taken place, but able to demand learners' intelligence to actualise their own learning. As Jörg (2009, p. 16) underlines, "reality, then may be understood differently: as possibilities and potentialities (...) learning in interaction by whole human beings should be viewed as dynamic processes of change both within and between dynamically interconnected networks of whole human beings". Thus, different kinds of learning and learning contexts are mentioned.

b. Can learning contexts still be materialised? Do learning contexts still matter (Edwards 2009b)?

When education is referred to as a previously organised plan, the most frequent contexts in these documents are *schools* and *workplaces*. This expresses a contradiction in itself, since it assembles different modes of learning and teaching in the broad scope of lifelong learning. Facing this dilemma, Young (2010, p. 4) emphasizes "the importance of distinguishing between types of learning and between what can be learned under different conditions, and in particular the differences between the learning that is incidental to some other activity—as in homes, communities and workplaces—and the learning that is possible in specialized educational institutions such as schools, colleges and universities". It seems that LLL promises something different.

In the words of Edwards (2009a, p. 1), "insofar as we expand our concept of learning to embrace apparently all strata of life, we might be said to start to lose the conceptual basis for talking specifically of a learning context". We can state that this is consistent with the breakdown of borders between life and learning proposed by the analysed policy documents, especially those from group B. Learning contexts cannot be understood as a priori objects, but rather as dependent on a subjective and retrospective discourse that *contextualises* learning moments in given situations. In this way, we would argue that contexts for learning and teaching are becoming subjective matters. The emergence of this subjective determination of contexts demands material conditions from societies and educational systems. Instead of a specific *space* for learning, societies and educational systems within LLL need the assurance of a specific *time* for people to realise and recognise their daily experiences as learning. Jacotot sending his students away from school to read Telemachus exemplifies this (Rancière 1991).

c. Does lifelong learning constrain learning *for* life or learning as a life experience (Larrosa 2002)?

The concept of competence has emerged as a way of articulating everything that is needed for living in an interconnected world. When we look at the definition of key competence, we find references to a combination of knowledge, attitudes and capacities, considered to be "key" in the sense that they are essential for all people in contemporary society—hoping to achieve the profile outlined in the title of this paper. A basic ambiguity should be underlined, since these sets of key competences are sometimes identified as the result of lifelong learning and, other times, as a previous requirement for people to engage in LLL. Therefore indistinctness is present, since it is not clear which one of the perspectives—competences as the *result of* learning or competences as a *requirement for* learning—is prevailing.

Other ambiguities can be traced regarding both the general definition of key competence and the eight key competences identified. We question to what extent this option of operationalising knowledge allows for the construction of knowledge.

Larrosa (2002) calls attention to the confusion between “information, knowledge and learning”, used as interchangeable terms. The author’s point of view is that the notion of knowledge is more than the simple adding up of information, and that it goes beyond the learning process itself because it has to be understood as the ongoing process of personal “experience” as a meaning-making process. From this point of view, the space for knowledge cannot be “filled up” with science, technology or information; because it depends upon the individual’s own experience of life itself. As in Rancière’s (1991) proposal, the discourse about the learning process must reflect the relationship things have with each other—since everything has to do with everything else.

Our analyses revealed that LLL promotes learners and teachers’ promptness to learn, which works as a pedagogical translation of the idea of flexibility emanating from the contemporary neo-liberal discourse. This is clear since the most emphasised dimension of learning is *becoming always ready to learn*, as if learnt competences should be disposable and replaceable, thus evidencing each subject’s flexibility. The reality imposed by the knowledge-based society, which leads individuals to a constant updating and retraining of skills, has serious consequences in the way it transforms the meaning of the educational process. Based on Biesta’s (2005) arguments, these changes lead to an understanding of education as a process regarded as a set of economic transactions, where the learner is seen as a consumer whose needs must be met by educational institutions. Taking into consideration the contributions of Rancière (1991) and Edwards (2009a), this attitude towards learning must be reshaped, since the personal will to learn, as well as the discursive and narrative exercises, take time, and leave traces on subjects that cannot be removed. We argue that, thus understood, individual centred learning is incompatible with *disposable* learning.

An *Hermeneutics of Externality* on Lifelong Learning Policy Documents

With wonderful clarity, he saw in himself all the skills and qualities that his time appreciated (...), but he had lost the possibility to apply them, and if in the end are football players and horses, that have genius, then all that is left for us is the use we can make of them [skills and qualities] in order to save our singularity, that’s the reason why he decided to take vacations from life for a year to discover the most adequate use he could do of his capabilities. (Musil 2008, p. 82)²

Can we relate Musil’s words with the definition of lifelong learner we proposed at the beginning? Does the definition express the competences appreciated in our times?

Getting back to our initial assumptions, some lines of flight can be drawn:

There is a world and life going on outside the policy documents. Therefore, this understanding of the lifelong learner may be considered together with other texts beyond lifelong learning. We think that, what is *outside* the text may reshape what is *inside* the text. Our strategy was to “plug” (Deleuze 1995) texts of different natures and knowledge fields. The policy documents were contrasted with texts from philosophy, educational theory and literature. These texts set a plateau (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), or an arena (Latour 2006), where theories and concepts were gathered. We define this strategy as a *hermeneutics of externality*, where the texts

² Our translation from the Portuguese edition.

outside respond to what is contained *inside* the policy documents, renegotiating meanings and subverting representation. By reintroducing concepts and theories into new contexts, new interpretations emerged. This externality made possible to highlight ambiguities, constraints and possibilities. If we decontextualize/recontextualize the political texts and erase/rebuild their intentionality, what will emerge? What is the result of this inter-discursive encounter? What new possibilities emerge from this movement of transgression? The transversal nature of educational theory, philosophy and literature allowed this gesture. What about texts from a different nature? Texts were used as emergency tools and the existing and unquestioned ambiguities of the policy documents were brought into light. Concepts like *ignorant school-master* or *experience* such as proposed by Rancière and Larrosa “have a necessity, as well as an unfamiliarity, and they have both to the extent they’re a response to real problems” (Deleuze 1995, p. 136), namely in policy.

Temporality becomes central to the epistemological, anthropological, sociological and systematic dimensions of education because learning happens every time and everywhere (this “where” is now a diffuse space, a temporal concept); because the lifelong learner is always in the process of becoming (is ‘sentenced to life’); because the teacher is a materialiser of experiences, a feeder of volitions and a prompter of intelligences (and no longer a *savant*); and because the contexts for learning and teaching are becoming subjective matters. The nature of this temporality, especially the one emerging from the policy documents, must be considered and fully analysed if subjective experiences (in Larrosa’s sense) are to matter. Alternative understandings of knowledge and its relation to reality need to be explored, emergent perspectives about the human subject need to be materialised, and a specific *time* for people to realise and recognise their daily experiences as learning need to be assured by societies and educational systems.

As stated by Osberg et al. (2008, p. 215), “Many if not most of our Western, modern educational practices and institutions seem to rely upon a representational epistemology”. This epistemology relies on the idea that knowledge is about developing more accurate understandings of a finished reality, and truth is understood as correspondence with reality; it is a ‘spacial’ epistemology, which separates the object of knowledge (existing out there) from knowledge itself; it is, in this sense, a closed epistemology. An epistemology of emergence is needed if we assume that knowledge emerges from our transactions with the world and is understood as a response, which brings forth new worlds. Therefore, we need tools to renegotiate our world. “One could say ‘acquiring’ knowledge does not ‘solve’ problems for us: it creates problems for us to solve” (Osberg et al. 2008, p. 221). In this sense knowledge is understood in a pragmatic and complex way, with learning as response and teaching as ‘enacting’ (Davis and Sumara 1997) new ways of being in the world. As such, knowledge and life are no longer separate entities—how we conceive the world is relevant to how we live in it. This perspective suppresses some relevant dichotomies—learning and life, mind and body, private and public, ethics and epistemology—in ways we can only partially foresee. Policy documents on lifelong learning seem to be somehow in between these dichotomies, enclosed between the two epistemologies.

As St.Pierre (2004, p. 293) argues, “All of education and science is grounded in certain theories of the subject; and if the subject changes, everything else must as well”. The subject emerging from lifelong learning is a subject of temporality, of non-linearity, of becoming. However, the idea of flexibility present in the policy documents may be problematic. Flexibility as a performative, adaptative characteristic, related to efficacy and efficiency, appeals to individuals’ permanent adaptation to certain economic, political and social orders (as in the political discourse about learning and in the definition of the competences). Thus, the lifelong learner functions as a “soft-subject” who is the carrier of

a set of competences. These competences pass through him without necessarily “marking” him. If competences are understood as being independent from the competent subjects, we face the risk that the learned competences will not inscribe on the lifelong learner. How can individual’s experiences, decisions, actions and possibilities *inscribe* (Gil 2004)? How can learning become matter/be materialised? Our intensive reading of the texts allowed plugging policy texts to existential issues.

Assuming, as we stated at the beginning, that the policy texts of the European Union about lifelong learning are embedded in epistemological, anthropological, and sociological assumptions (either in an explicit or an implicit way) and are of a systematic nature, the intensive reading we have proposed highlighted that those assumptions do not always emerge in convergent and consistent ways. The exploration of those ambiguities through the use of external conceptual and hermeneutic tools allowed us to understand the European Union documents as both opening and constraining possibilities. Ambiguities and contradictions present in the policy documents need not be surpassed, but rather suspended as a means to force openness.

Appendix

See Table 1.

Table 1 List of documents

No. document	Title	Author(s)	Date	Type	Pages
Group A—Key Competences					
1	Implementations of “Education and Training 2010” Work Programme Working group “Basic Skills, entrepreneurship and foreign languages”	European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture	November 2003	Report	65
2	Implementations of “Education and Training 2010” Work Programme Working group “Key Competences”	European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture	November 2004	Report	51
3	Implementations of “Education and Training 2010” Work Programme Working group “Key Competences” Analysis of the mapping of the Key Competency Framework	European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture	November 2004	Report	37
4	Implementations of “Education and Training 2010” Work Programme Working group “Key Competences” Key Competences for Lifelong Learning—A European Reference Framework	European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture	November 2004	Report	22

Table 1 continued

No. document	Title	Author(s)	Date	Type	Pages
5	Implementations of "Education and Training 2010" Work Programme Focus Group On Key Competences	European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture	June 2005	Report	18
6	Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning	European Commission	November 2005	Proposal for a recommendation	21
7	Opinion of the Regions Committee about the Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning	Regions Committee	June 2006	Opinion	21
8	Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning	European Parliament and Council	December 2006	Recommendation	9
Group B—Policy framework programmes Education & Training 2010 and Lifelong Learning 2007–2013					
9	A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning	European Commission	October 2000	Memorandum	36
10	Report from the Education Council to the European Council" The concrete future objectives of education and training systems"	Council of the European Union	February 2001	Report	17
11	Communication from the Commission "Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality"	European Commission	November 2001	Communication	40
12	Detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of Education and training systems in Europe	Education Council and European Commission	February 2002	Work Programme	22
13	Council Resolution for Lifelong Learning	Council of the European Union	June 2002	Resolution	
14	Investing efficiently in education and training: an imperative for Europe	European Commission	January 2003	Communication	31

Table 1 continued

No. document	Title	Author(s)	Date	Type	Pages
15	“Education and Training 2010” The success of the Lisbon Strategy. Hinges on Urgent Reforms Joint interim report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe	Council and European Commission	February 2004	Report	42
16	DECISION No 791/2004/EC OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 21 April 2004 establishing a Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level and support specific activities in the field of education and training	European Parliament and European Council	April 2004	Decision	9
17	Modernizing Education and Training: A vital contribution to prosperity and social cohesion in Europe. 2006 Joint Interim Report of the Council and of the Commission on progress under the “Education and Training 2010” Work Programme	Council and European Commission	February 2006	Report	19
18	COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL AND TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems	European Commission	September 2006	Communication	11
19	DECISION No 1720/2006/EC OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 15 November 2006 establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning	European Parliament and European Council	November 2006	Decision	24
20	Draft Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on efficiency and equity in education and training	Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States	December 2006	Conclusions	4

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