

# The Bologna Process and curricular changes at higher education: what are skills for?<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This article presents an ensemble of reformulations which took place in higher education in the context of the Bologna Process, taking into account the transformations in the capitalist system, which made relations of production more flexible, especially when it comes to the training of the worker. Seen in these terms, a historical and conceptual debate about the model of skills will be presented, from a critical perspective. At the same time, the role of knowledge in the globalization process is highlighted so that, from that point on, it is possible to demonstrate how Europe promoted a wide educational reform through the Declaration of Bologna. The document was created, amongst other reasons, to orientate the necessary changes in European higher education in order to guarantee its competitiveness in the global dynamics. Thus, some guidelines established by the Treaty for the renovation of the European university curriculums are discussed, based on the definition of general and specific skills, linking those guidelines to the demands of the labor market. By establishing skills, the project predicts that the contents must be organized in order to meet, not only instruction, but also the didactic strategies which will favor the learning process, abiding by what is asked in the professional profiles. Finally, this composition aims to arouse reflections on the modifications of the European education policies, by explaining how the discussion about the model of skills exerted some influence on the process of delimitation of the adopted strategies.

## Keywords

Bologna Process – Higher education – Qualification – Model of skills.

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S1678-4634201844174148>

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For the writing of this text, the premise is that there is a close relationship between the transformations that took place in the capitalist labor market and the training of the worker, whether established by public institutions or private institutions. In the European context, since 1990, both the labor market and the training of the worker have been influenced by neoliberal policies, producing over the years, for instance, the rise of the unemployment rates, changes in the employability criteria or changes in the necessary qualifications criteria for the insertion in the labor market and changes in the forms of work contracts. Therefore, it must be considered that the impacts of such policies have initiated several strategies by each particular country.

To meet this context, in this article, a brief analysis on how the neoliberal policies of the European bloc are related to globalization will be presented and, more specifically, some of the effects of this relation with the Bologna Process will be presented as well. Such a process became known as the educational reform implanted in different countries that are part of the European Union (EU), from 1990, in the institutions that offer higher education.

Initially, it was considered relevant to present reflections around the qualification of the worker for the work position, such as aspects related to the model of skills. Subsequently, data that points some work conditions and the conditions of the European worker in the late 20th century and early 21st century were presented. Thenceforth, the article presents elements as to inquire how Europe, facing the need to integrate its countries in the dynamics of the global market, promoted a wide renovation of the higher education system. European universities that joined the Bologna Process were oriented to redefine their curriculums based on general and specific skills, which reveal a need of adaption in professional training to face the demands of the labor market, alongside changes of attitudes and pedagogical practices, once traditional in the universities of the *Old World*.

This composition proposes a reflection on the process of teaching, learning and training from those curriculum alterations and the transmission of instrumentalized knowledge, subordinating the university to neoliberal dictates. Lastly, positive and negative aspects of the Bologna Treaty will be presented in accordance to different social segments.

## **From the qualification speech to the model of skills speech**

The term qualification gained importance and began to be used more emphatically from the second half of the 20th century, influenced by the process of productive restructuring, also known as flexible capitalism. The Fordism/Taylorism crisis resulted in the flexible accumulation model, in which production follows a series of demands and the worker has to dominate more than the repetitive work process they are responsible for. In this new scenario, the work force had to adapt to new market demands, including all steps referred to the work done.

The model of production structured in accordance with the assumptions related to the Fordism/Taylorism model proposed the application of scientific principles in the

work organization. With the purpose of rationalizing the productive process and raising productivity of workers, it advocated the adequate use of working time, the control of activities performer by the worker, the division, the mechanization and the specialization of distributed tasks in the production line. Moreover, it operated in the logic of rewards and punishments with regards to behavior and productivity of workers in the face of hierarchical leadership inside the factories.

To organize production, it was necessary to get the worker ready to meet the requirements of the work posts. In this context, work is intertwined with education in attempts to qualify the workforce. Although restricted, the sense of work in the capitalist society was constituted in the face of production and aggregated utility and the generation of profit and accumulation. In the same reductionist way, education is commonly associated to scholarship which determines the qualifications of workers.

In this sense, both the articulation of industrials and the performance of the State are marked by the attempt to create/fortify school units which are destined to prepare workers for the exercise of labor, training them and teaching them how to handle tools, operate machines, etc. Such units are responsible, also, for making sure that the worker has the technical qualification compatible with the requirement established by the work post.

The changes and technological advancements which were incorporated to the work processes raised new attributes for the work posts, even creating an apparent reduction of these, when, in fact, there was a modification of the very nature of the work post. Because of the definition of new attributions, the worker who used to hold a work post found themselves underqualified for the job.

To Braverman (1987, p. 365), as principles of scientific organization are incorporated in the productive process, making it more and more complex, workers lose capacity to operate the existent technology for production, and when “their role does not demand formal preparation of any sort”, they are classified as disqualified for the job. This indicates that this process consists of the correspondence between the capacity the worker has and the set of required abilities for the new job.

The technical and organizational changes inherent to the global economic processes of capitalism, which resulted in the restructuring of productive processes, redirected the thought on qualification, getting closer, thus, to the model of skills speech.

Work is not the set of tasks descriptively associated to the job anymore, it becomes the direct prolongation of the skill the individual mobilizes in the face of a professional situation that is more mutable and more complex. This complexity of situations makes the unforeseen more and more uneventful and routinely. (FLEURY; FLEURY, 2001, p. 186).

The concept of technical qualification refers to the Fordist/Taylorist model of production and organization of work, followed by the productive restructuring and the adoption of Taylorism. The model of skills speech, by its turn, converses with the new forms of work which result from this process of changes. However, there are many differences and much questioning about the role of the model of skills in the face of qualification. If the idea of qualification was associated to the transmission of

immediate information necessary to the realization of work, certified by formal spaces of education, the model of skills combines multiple abilities in a complex and flexible logic of the relations of production.

According to Hirata (1994), the notion of skill emerged in France amidst business groups and it was then appropriated by economists and sociologists. It arose from the need to evaluate and classify new types of knowledge and new types of abilities created from the new demands of work. To Tanguy and Ropé (1997), the expansion of the model of skills in the world promotes diffusion of a speech capable of redirecting the strategies of training for work, as well as stimulus to the development of other abilities of the worker within the framework of multinationals. The notion of skill suggests new organization of work and participation in production management, which demands from the worker – so as to adjust to the new structure – actions such as collaboration, team work, engagement and willingness to learn.

Hirata (1994, p.133) criticizes this model and claims that workers are not always duly paid when “taken in the new model of organization of work to participation of production management, team work and to a greater level of involvement in the strategies of competitiveness of the company”. However, it is required from workers that they acquire new skills each day, according to the demands and the objectives of the positions they occupy.

The notion of skill is about a *natural* process of development of the human being. It is essentialist when it comes to the set of conditions and characteristics innate to human beings that were coopted by the dimension of culture to attribute functions in the social division of labor, for example, the distinction between gender and generation in daily activities. However, if considered by the logic of production, skill refers to a strategy of capitalism to perfect the productive process with the goal of raising accumulation, cutting costs and adequation of technological advancements.

This process is accompanied by the proposal of change in the work management process. The notion of skills was, for this reason, rescued and gained a particular meaning in the context of search for new methods of organization of social production: the meaning of structural axis for the establishment of a new pattern of regulation of the use of labor, correspondent and functional to the new conception of productivity (quality control and proactiveness in face of market fluctuations and the growing diversification of products). (MACHADO, 2007, p. 285).

The new model of organization of labor demands from the worker the acquisition of general and specific skills which translate into graduations and titles, according to capitalism demands. Bruno (2011, p. 554) explains that requirements imposed by technological development and by the changes in capitalism led to the need of reforming curriculums and post-medium and higher learning courses to “adequate them to the new segmentation of the labor market”, based on the transmission of instrumentalized knowledge, in which the student is capable of transforming the “knowing” they learned in school into behavioral and work techniques. In other words, skill-based knowledge.

If, on one side, the model of skill consists of the attempt to substitute the notion of technicalist qualification, on the other side, it can also be an attempt to reaffirm parameters of capital in face of the necessity of qualification. Thus,

[...] the choice for the model of skill (in the business meaning) would be anchored in a logic of recomposition of the hegemony of capital, where the redetermination of qualification and the strategies of professional training are part of a process of resocialization and acculturation of the working class, having as a mission to reintegrate it to the new models of production and capitalism management in its phase of transnationalization. (MANFREDI, 2000, p. 13).

From another perspective, the concept of skills is also developed in the educational scope and has enunciated alterations of epistemological order which elevate the cognitive and constructivist pedagogical perspective in detriment of behaviorism, raising changes in educational objectives and in pedagogical projects since the decade of 1980, relegating the conception of the school curriculum based on the transmission of knowledge to a secondary place and prioritizing the building of knowledge. The notion of skills consists of a set of concepts of theoretical scope that seeks to incorporate, in the school, at curriculums and in the programs, principles based on the development of autonomous subjects capable of positioning themselves and making decisions in face of situations and problems associated to reality. It is understood that the emergent model of school should prepare its public for life, and, therefore, bases the relation of teaching-learning in the mobilization of knowledges and abilities that allow leading with problems, with the capacity of negotiation, improvisation and flexibilization of results. (PERRENOUD, 1999).

Regarding the curriculum renovations in the national and international scope, mainly in the curriculum management, Roldão (2003) points that the approach by skill implies the capacity of needs and abilities being triggered in accordance to the situations experienced in the teaching-learning relation that, in a certain way, are related to everyday real life problems and demand from professors and students alike immediate and assertive decision-making as to the best result to be reached.

It is important to point out that one of the implications of the notion of skill in relation to the training of the worker is the interlacement of the capital-bound concept of mercantilist nature with the conceptual unfolding in the educational sphere, which can, in several moments, take advantage of the mobilization of the wisdom of the worker and their abilities to optimize both the training and the processes of work whose interests cater only to or mostly to the labor market. Thus, it is possible to state that the approach by skills constitutes already an advancement in comparison to the simple transfer of knowledge attached to technical qualification, because it allows a process of knowledge building from the consideration of preexistent wisdom and abilities, in addition to foreseeing stimulus to the capacity of decision-making in face of situation-problems in an autonomous way, even in face of inquiries about the pedagogical and marketing goals and objectives which orient actions, programs and the educational renovations.

## **Labor and workers in the European Community**

Palazuelos Manso (2005) argues that the economy of several European countries has experienced different stages – from expansion and recession – from the year 1994 to the year 2003. The growth rate of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by inhabitant in the European Community had a 3,2% annual rate in the 1994-2000 period and a 1,2% annual rate in the 2000-2003 period. An intense reduction in the GDP annual average rate by inhabitant is identified in the second period. In other words, in the year 2000, there are already indications of a period of recession which was related with the financial explosions that had previously occurred in both Europe and the United States of America. If a few individual countries are analyzed during the 2000-2003, it is possible to note that:

Ireland, Greece and Spain remain relatively immune to the recession, with more favorable rates, though lower than those obtained during expansion (except for Greece, where the rates are now higher). In this group, there are also Finland, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom, with weaker rates in a specific year, but with an average growth around 2%. After those, there are France and Sweden and, after, those countries where recession is intense and persistent: Germany, Holland, Portugal, Austria, Belgium, Denmark and Italy, with average growth rates that reflect situations of stagnation, especially in the first three countries. (PALAZUELOS MANSO, 2005, p. 18, translated).

As for job offers, they grew significantly in all European countries in the 1994-2000 period, which also made possible a 4,5% raise in salary (PALAZUELOS MANSO, 2005). Alongside the data presented by the author, Eurostat (2017) presents a few employment figures by country in subsequent years. For instance, Germany, which had a previous 69,4% rate of employment, presented, in 2008, 2009 and 2010, respectively, employment rates of 74%, 74,2% and 75%. However, there was a decrease in employment figures in other European countries in these years. For example, Spain, in 2005, had an employment rate of 67,5% of its population, and, in 2010, there was a decrease and the rate was 62,8%.

However, the end of the first decade of the 21st century was marked by the 2008 international economic crisis which affected most European countries in a more intense way and has reverberated, more or less, on a few countries to present days. However, the crisis joins other facts that had been happening previously, namely the process of modification of the capitalist productive process, the internalization of capital, social inequality, the deterioration of public policies by the State on education, health and housing, for example. In this context, as presented previously, several European Community countries have been facing challenges towards growth and work offer.

About indexes which were identified in the inter-crisis period, Laparra and Perez Eransus (2012) analyze a few characteristics of unemployed people in Denmark, Spain, France and the United Kingdom in the years of 2006 and 2010. The chart that follows presents data according to some variables:



**Chart 1** – Unemployed by gender, age, education and nationality in Denmark, in France, in Spain and in the United Kingdom – 2006 and 2010

	Denmark		France		Spain		United Kingdom	
	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010
Men	3,4	8,4	6,4	19,8	8,9	9,2	5,8	8,8
Women	4,6	6,6	11,6	20,6	10,1	9,5	4,9	7,0
Age 15-24	7,7	13,8	17,9	41,6	21,4	23,2	13,6	19,7
Age 25-49	3,2	6,5	7,5	18,6	8,3	7,9	4,1	6,1
Age 50-64	3,9	5,8	5,7	13,8	6,2	6,6	2,9	4,7
Low educational level (lower than secondary level)	6,7	11,0	10,3	27,4	14,0	15,6	9,2	13,8
Middle educational level (secondary education)	3,2	7,0	8,5	18,8	8,7	8,7	5,2	8,1
High educational level (post-secondary)	3,3	5,0	6,3	11,8	6,5	5,5	2,7	4,2
Nationals	3,8	7,1	8,1	17,9	9,0	8,8	5,2	7,9
<b>Foreigners</b>	8,1	14,5	11,5	32,1	18,3	17,6	8,3	8,2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,0</b>	<b>7,6</b>	<b>8,6</b>	<b>20,1</b>	<b>9,5</b>	<b>9,3</b>	<b>5,4</b>	<b>8,0</b>

Source: Laparra e Perez Eransus (2012, p. 30).

The data presented by the chart enables multiple reviews. Amongst them, it is noted that, France excluded, unemployment has affected men more than it has affected women in the period between 2006 and 2010. It is noted that the loss of jobs has affected all ages, but it is more intense in a specific age range. In all countries, the young population, between 15 and 24 years old, was affected by unemployment, especially in France that, in 2010, had an unemployment rate of 41% and those who had a higher level of education were, in percentual terms, less affected by the crisis. As for differentiation between national and foreign populations, unemployment has affected, mostly, both. However, as for the situation of foreigners in all four countries, it is important to point out that, in Denmark and France, there was a greater impact of unemployment.

According to Laparra and Perez Eransus (2012), when the economic crisis in Europe began, one in every three people was entirely unemployed and had been in this situation for over a year. Moreover, there was a decrease of salary and working hours, as well as an increase of temporary contracts and dismissals, for example, which led to “a larger number of people in the spectrum of poverty and social exclusion” in Europe (LAPARRA; PEREZ ERANSUS, 2012, p. 14, translated).

Some of the last data on unemployment, disclosed by Eurostat (2017), show that Greece and Spain have the highest unemployment rates in Europe. In November 2016, Greece had an unemployment rate of 23% and Spain, in January 2017, had a rate of 18,2%. In January 2017, Czech Republic was the country with the lowest unemployment rate, at 3,4%, followed by Germany, at 3,8%. In the same period, Romania (5,4%), Austria (5,7%) and Ireland (6,7%) were some of the countries with the lowest unemployment rates.

In this context, it is possible to question the impact of the crisis on the working population, especially if considering what was identified in relation to all three educational levels presented on Chart 1. The fact that unemployment affects young people more deeply has been the main justification for the (re)definition of all necessary qualifications

for entering the work market and, specifically, in the European educational structure in face of the demands for a *global and nomadic worker*.

What has been much debated is that the training of the worker in Europe will require deeper knowledge and new skills. The confirmation for this was a greater incentive for the elaboration of attempts to implement the *Europe Strategy 2020*, a program inserted in the European Commission agenda for growth and employment policies. Amongst different programs, in the years following 2010, those that aim vocational training of young people and adults stand out in both public institutions and business institutions. (PARLAMENTO EUROPEO, 2017).

These strategies demonstrate Europe's concern in face of the challenge of asserting its competitiveness in the global market and justify the identification of the need to create an European common space of knowledge, or European Higher Learning Space (EHLS). In the context of globalization, knowledge is considered an input. Thus, it became known as "widely recognized as a propeller element for economic activity, considering that productive systems and international competitiveness rely more and more on technological advancements generated by knowledge". (AGUIAR, 1998, p. 103).

In this sense, since the end of the 1990's, countries in Europe have been implementing a wide-ranging reform on higher education which can, amongst other guidelines, contemplate the model of skills, an aspect which will be dealt with from this point on.

## **The European Higher Learning Space (EHLS) and the model of skills**

The Bologna Process was signed in the city of Bologna in 1999, during an assembly of Education Ministers from a few European countries. The Treaty had as its premise that the "constitution of a united and strong Europe depended on higher learning focused on innovation, competitiveness and productivity", according to Dias Sobrinho (2009, p. 132). Confirming on the intentions of the reform, Morgado (2009, p. 50) presents the goals of the Bologna process as: "the edification of the European Higher Learning Space [...], the consolidation and the enrichment of the European citizenship and the raise in competitiveness with other systems of the world (in particular, the United States of America and Japan)."

The *Implementation Report of Bologna 2015* declares that, in the past three years, 47 countries and more than 4.000 institutions of higher learning and other organizations have worked as to seek structural adequations and quality adequations in the European Space of Education. Although not all countries and institutions have joined the Process, what was imposed in this context, according to Catani (2010), was a *character of uniformization*, opposed to the feature of organizational diversity which was always a strong characteristic of European universities throughout the centuries.

Amongst other prerogatives pointed out in the document, according to Dias Sobrinho (2009), a compatible system of titles and degrees was adopted, with a diploma acknowledged in the member countries, which was possible with the cumulation of credits obtained internationally and validated by a common system of credits (ECTS –



European Credit Transfer System). This credit system aims the cumulation and transfer of credits by fulfilling a predetermined workload in a study program. The ECTS serve, also, as a reference for the recognition of titles acquired in the European countries that joined the Treaty.

In the context of the European higher learning reform, some curriculums have been formatted from the definition of general and specific skills, established by a model known as *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe*. Bolívar (2009, p. 107-108) explains that *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe*.

[...] has served as a model for the project of titles in the convergence process of Bologna. [...] According to “professional profiles”, the linked skills are determined and, in its turn, the selection of knowledge, and the contents are determined depending on the skills (goals) of each professional profile. The goals, in a general or specific level, must be expressed in accordance with skills, which allow training for a specific professional practice (in the First Cycle – Graduation) or for specialization and investigation. (Second Cycle – Post-graduation).

By establishing skills, the project predicts that the contents must be arranged in order to meet, not only training, but also didactic strategies which will favor learning, answering what is requested for professional profiles. Aboites (2010, p. 31, translated) claims that, “instead of focusing on building only one list of academic contents for each graduation course in all of Europe, it is important to emphasize that the objective must be to determine skills”.

Bolívar (2011, p. 118, translated) explains that, according to “professional profiles” linked skills are determined and, in its turn, the selection of knowledge and contents is performed according to competences (objectives) of each professional profile”. These are the objectives that express the training for the first cycle or for the second cycle.

In another piece, Bolívar (2009, p. 112) explains what he called a *tripod*:

It would be about connecting the structure of knowledge of a school discipline (content analysis), with the formative demands or the vocational demands (necessity analysis) and both aspects will result in a determined sequence of learning. (task analysis).

According to Bolívar (2009), general skills can be those related not only to training, but also related to capabilities and abilities used in several situations – for example, ability to lead and plan -, and can be used for any titles. The author claims, also, that these skills are “developed for the most part with the use of suitable methods of teaching and learning” (BOLÍVAR, 2009, p. 108). The specific abilities refer to those areas of study, to knowledge itself and, according to the same author, “they mention the appropriate methods and techniques relevant to the area, for example, manuscript analysis, chemical analysis, sampling techniques, etc., according to a specific area”. (BOLÍVAR, 2009, p. 108).

The origin of the term “skill”, which was mentioned in the beginning of this composition, is criticized by Bolívar (2011, p. 110, translated) when the author declares that the “the term skills has its origin in the business world and that makes it questionable as a

model of training for basic and higher education, by linking it to neoliberal policies which subordinate education to labor market and human resources management demands.”

Then, Bolívar (2011, p. 117, translated) mentions the Royal Decree 1393/2007 (GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA, 2007), Spanish, about *Ordenación de las Enseñanzas Universitarias*, which brings orientations about how “study plans which lead to the attainment of a title should, therefore, have as their core objectives the acquisition of skills by the students”. Once more, the author exhibits subordination of higher education to the market labor by adapting to this title structure, expressing the results of skill learning. In the author’s words, “beyond other risks, for many it involves excessive subordination to professional world and labor market requirements. (BOLÍVAR, 2011, p. 118, translated).

Regardless, curriculums, in some European universities, have been formulated following orientations from international organisms such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank, a clear sign of capital’s aspirations of incorporation of European citizens in a competitive and global labor market. Bolívar (2011) claims that the large number of students who abandon school before having acquired the abilities required for their inclusion in a knowledge-based society as well as in the labor market is a concern of the European Commission.

For this reason, the European Commission has established, by the use of documents, the necessary skills for a training process that is able to guarantee inclusion of young people in the world of employment. These are abilities that must be developed, such as the eight Key Competences: “mother tongue communication, foreign language communication, mathematics skills and science and technology basic skills; digital skills, learning to learn, interpersonal skills, intercultural, social and civic skills, entrepreneurial spirit, and cultural expression.”. (BOLÍVAR, 2011, p. 112, translated).

The curriculums of some basic and higher learning institutions of the European Union members have been altered so as to contemplate those skills. This fact reinforces the need of flexibilization by the individual and the search for continuous training in order to maintain their employability.

Especially, the content learned in the university has been oriented by labor market demands, while the responsibility for the acquisition of skills demanded by the labor market is transferred to the individual. According to Dias Sobrinho (2009, p. 137):

The labor market requires multiple and flexible social and professional attitudes and abilities coupled with technical and scientific skills which can handle more general aspects of knowledge and professional performance and, also, more specific and changeable aspects.

Oliveira (2003, p. 65) presents a critical reflection on the notion of skill by claiming that,

[...] from the beginning, the notion of skill has been criticized because of its reductionist character, coupled with the development of technical tools, which seek to uniform and standardize the complexity of relations between the worker training and the job, considering a pragmatic and utilitarian vision, oriented to facilitate the mobility of workers in the European Union.

Considering that there is a concern to reach a marketing demand, the role of the teacher as the conductor of the learning process in this structure is questioned, the process would be oriented for professional specialized training, at times uncritical and amputated, at the expense of uncommitted research and the need of individual students for knowledge then available. In this sense it is possible to make use of Bolívar words (2011, p. 114, translated): “the skills become learning gains, instead of the acquisition of knowledge, affecting objectives, the role of the teacher, teaching activities and the evaluation itself.

## **Consensus and conflicts in the Bologna model**

Despite the challenges faced by the reform of higher education in Europe, positive changes can be observed. The *Bologna Implementation Report 2015* brings advancements by then registered at the European space of university cooperation. With regards to quality, there are strong evidences that quality has been encouraged and that some institutions of higher learning have been developing their own strategies to guarantee quality. In this regard, the report states that quality assurance systems, focused on teaching, are evolving and that there is concern for transparency and disclosure of evaluation results, even when these results are not positive (EUROPEAN COMMISSION/EURYDICE/EACEA/EURYDICE, 2015).

There are a number of authors that, despite their critical stance, still consider some virtues in the model. López López (2011) presents a few critiques of the process and discloses in a clear way a few positions contrary to the reform and a few favorable positions. Amongst the contrary positions is, according to the author, the fear of “losing the identity of the university institution and their training referential for market policies and neoliberalism interests.” (LÓPEZ LÓPEZ, 2011, p. 161, translated).

On the other hand, the author presents some favorable positions to the model of skills and its potential formative value and states that “the approach by skills does not mean, necessarily and exclusively, adopting a mercantilist and neocapitalist orientation”. (LÓPEZ LÓPEZ, 2011, p. 162, translated). Thus, the author presents the position of a few colleagues who defend the model and its contributions for students’ training and proposes reflections, for example, on the role of the teacher and their challenges in the context of the EHLS. However, the author highlights that the dangers and risks warned by those who are against the focus on skill must not be disregarded or forgotten.

Regarding training and the applicability of acquired knowledge in several contexts, the *Bologna Implementaton Report 2015* must be considered when it states that most countries value student-focused learning, despite contemplating that there is a group that does not consider this aspect even in legislation and, in this sense, going forward is needed. (EUROPEAN COMMISSION/EURYDICE/EACEA/EURYDICE, 2015).

Thus, it is relevant to consider Dias Sobrinho words (2009, p. 149): “Titles and diplomas, as it is known, are based on rules and generate rights, which is not always simple to fix in an international scenario”. The author words arouse a reflection on social, economic and cultural differences present in the countries of the bloc. How is it possible to consider that training in a country is equivalent to training in another country in terms

of time, quality, career and even financial return, when it is known that skills which were learned at school or even at the university are not useful out of the school space?

In this way, Bolívar warns (2011, p. 115, translated), there is also a “lack of basic abilities to adapt to life and work situations, which demand complex answers”. The author warns of the danger of modifying qualitatively the way of learning and teaching.

So, it is understood that initial education should prepare the citizen for a full life and provide them with a minimum cultural capital so as to make it possible for them to integrate with society. School should assure fundamental learning for an active citizen participation, integrated in collective life. Basic skills for this training should, therefore, be contemplated in subjects and disciplines of the early years, in a transversal way in each one of them to a greater or lesser extent.

Bolívar (2011) warns, also, that social problems, in the last few years, have been delegated to the school and faculty. This has brought accumulation of tasks and frustration for the faculty, because school should focus on assuring essential learning, considering basic skills that are imperative for effective participation in public life and the employment world, without the risk of exclusion. However, school has not been able to deal with that.

Moreover, it has been questioned whether the fact that the requirement for individuals to acquire key skills or basic skills does not contemplate the guarantee that all citizens will be able to equitably reach the levels of skill for life. For Bolívar (2011), this guarantee cannot be left randomly at the hand of the individual, family or society. The author defends that “real learning is only fit for action and in action”. (BOLÍVAR, 2011, p. 137, translated).

As for the objectives of skills in higher learning, it is important to point out that skills have placed the university at the service of the labor market, controlled by the capital. Despite criticism, the *Bologna Implementation Report 2015* considers the relation between employment and qualification a positive aspect. The statistics presented in the report reveal that there was improvement in employment prospects for young people who have gotten qualification, despite the impact of the economic crisis, which justifies a 20% percentage of young people who are much more qualified than the demands of the jobs they hold. (EUROPEAN COMMISSION/EURYDICE/EACEA/EURYDICE, 2015).

Therefore, the contents expressed in skills and linked to professional profiles presume utility knowledge, that is, to be used in an specific context:

Starting from the professional profile as a basis for decision making presumes subordinating university teaching to the employment world of “employers”, now expressed in terms of skills. Since it does not hide its mentors, a flexible labor market is desired in the globalized society: training individuals who possess active skills to adapt to an ever-changing work future, in a lifelong process of learning. (BOLÍVAR, 2011, p. 122, translated).

The efforts for the implementation of the higher learning reform project in Europe have, in their core, the necessity to ensure the survival of European countries in the global market dynamics, raising their competitiveness and disseminating European higher

education and its programs (DIAS SOBRINHO, 2009). According to Bolívar (2011), the EU strategy to create an European Higher Learning Space is *defensive*. In other words, it is a strategy to prepare the grounds on which to compete.

Since the beginning of the implantation of the Process, 15 years have gone by. Amidst the controversy on the proposed model, official reports and other publications confirm that the Bologna Process has advanced in Europe in order to allow homogenization of higher education in the continent, ensuring mobility of students and professionals in the bloc and in the global market. It must be pointed out that the EU still debates on the cohesion of curriculums and the mutual recognition of contents between institutions or the harmonization of higher learning. (ZGAGA, 2011).

However, there is still opposition and several difficulties which have been faced by institutions, students and faculty, in several countries. The best efforts have been executed in structural changes linked to new proposals of training and, to a lesser extent, in the cultural and qualitative changes this model proposes (LÓPEZ LÓPEZ, 2011).

Moreover, some authors question if education, whilst a public asset, has been neglected in the Bologna Process and these authors criticize the Process, joining associations of students. In this sense, Lima, Azevedo e Catani (2008, p. 14) state:

European student associations have been confirming themselves as one of the most critical sectors, considering that student conditions have rarely improved, that financial hindrances to mobility remain, that student participation in evaluation processes are still fragile, that access to the second cycle (Master's degree) and third cycle (Doctorate degree) are still not easily achievable in many countries, which is caused by sky-rocketing rates which, according to OECD, must progressively approach the real costs by student.

In addition, there are records of poor management practices that put the Process at risk and bring more opposition. A publication of ESIB (*The National Unions of Students in Europe*) (2005), titled *The black book of the Bologna Process* indicates, for instance, deficiencies in the implementation of ECTS and in diploma supplements in Polish universities, and it shows arbitrary assignments of ECTS in Denmark. It mentions Austria as a good example of implementation of the Bologna model, although it shows some practical ideological problems. Despite that, the *Bologna Implementation Report 2015* states that progress has been made since 2012 in the implementation of ECTS, especially with regards to credit transfers to other institutions, which meets the goals of the program to increase mobility in the European space. (EUROPEAN COMMISSION/EURYDICE/EACEA/EURYDICE, 2015).

All in all, the educational reform in Europe is a reason for much controversy. It is a true consensus that there is still much to do. *The Bologna Implementation Report 2015* itself recognizes that need and explains that there are still efforts from the bloc countries to search for a sole objective, but in distinct rhythms. The document also highlights the need to reinforce the bases of the Bologna Process through participation of politicians, faculty and students that are active in the European education space, which would be reasonable. Still, it is predictable that challenges are strongly imposed, because of the

cultural diversity, the social and historical conditions and the changes that illustrate the globalized world scenario.

## **Concluding remarks**

By reflecting on transformations inherent to global capitalism, it is possible to understand that the dynamics of production restructuring has strongly modified work processes, as well as the strategies of work training and the dissemination of knowledge. It has been considered that the guarantee of competitiveness in capitalist countries in the global market push them to invest in technology development by making use of knowledge as a fundamental input for the expansion of their lucrative activities. In this area of dispute, Europe has not hesitated to create an European space of knowledge and has implemented an extensive higher learning reform, known as Bologna Process, which has been taking worldwide proportions and has been raising various opinions.

It is noted that there are institutional difficulties in the State-Nations that have joined the Process and it was noted that universities, although with some resistance, have followed the proposed model, by favoring in their curriculums the development and the acquisition of general and specific skills, according to what professional profiles in the labor market dictate. It is questioned, though, that by directing the training of new professionals based on the proposed model, the university subordinates itself to market requirements, which nullifies and amputates holistic training, which by its turn prepares the citizen for an active participation in collective life.

It follows from what was exposed that the Bologna model, beyond the difficulties that are presented in face of institutions and students in terms of recognition of credits and titles, access and mobility, demands efforts to legitimize acquired skills. The possession of skills is established by the credit system, as an indicator of learning, and represents a global vision on what is the professional training of the individual. However, training translated into titles does not ensure that the worker has the skills to act in a certain position, because the position profile will be filled according to what is desired by the capital manager.

In accordance with the employability and unemployability rates that have been presented, insertion in the labor market in the European Community has challenged different social segments towards the (re)definition of strategies, be it by the civil society be it by the public authority in the sphere of the state.

Education, as it is, based on a model of skills, constitutes the development of utilitarian, stratified knowledge, that overvalues preparation for the labor market over training for the employment world, in its ontological value. In this way, it subordinates learning to capital demands and transfers to the individual responsibility for their employability, conditioned to the development of general and specific skills translated into several titles. By reflecting on the questions expressed, the question ought to be asked: what are skills for?



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*Received on: 05.01.2017*

*Reviews on: 07.03.2017*

*Approved on: 05.07.2017*

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