

Introduction

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The profound transformations the world has witnessed in the last three decades have not left any of the many spaces or dimensions that make up our present societies untouched, and have confronted governments and societies with the urgent need to develop different instruments, strategies and policies to cope with the changes without succumbing to their turbulences.

These transformations have had a particular impact on higher education, which has been tasked with the responsibility of providing societies with resources to deal efficiently with the new challenges and make them viable in an increasingly open world. In this context, higher education has occupied a rather paradoxical position: being affected by the changes of the modern world and, simultaneously, having to offer tools to cope with such metamorphoses.

This explains, to some degree, the many transformations or attempts of transformation there have been in the field of higher education worldwide, which have concerned the different dimensions that form part of it, especially the area of public policies, conceived as instruments to activate mechanisms of change. Thus, the instrumentation of public policies to attend to the many problematic areas of higher education is an issue that has occupied scholars, decision makers, national and international advisors, government officials, civil organization, etc., for the last two or three decades. If anything is certain nowadays, it is that we live and will continue to live in an ever more changing and ever more unpredictable world. Nevertheless, we must act as if we understood the direction of the changes and were able to trace their course, knowing full well that we do not actually possess the instruments needed to foresee the future. This is one of the great paradoxes of our time, one that every public decision made in any domain has to grapple with, imprinting it with a guesswork quality and confronting us with the same problems over and over again.

This issue of *Diálogos sobre educación* is inscribed in this setting and echoes the current concerns about some crucial issues that have shaped the course of public policies towards higher education from the 1990s to the present. We are glad to see the interest shown by many researchers of these subjects to contribute to the debate and accept our invitation to send articles addressing a wide range of issues related to higher education policies.

Thus, the articles that make up the *dossier* of this issue of *Diálogos sobre educación* follow three broad thematic lines. The first line deals with some of the issues that have been the subject of more discussion in the field of higher education, i.e. those related to accreditation, quality, evaluation, and diversification, on the one hand, as well as coverage and inclusion, on the other hand. The former set of issues is addressed in the texts by Perrotta and González, and the latter in the texts by Ramos and Parra. The second thematic line covers issues having to do

with the university-enterprise linkage (Juárez), the importance of knowledge and its utilization (Naidorf) and the policies of advanced education (Godínez). A third group of texts addresses the issue of training for teaching and for citizenship, with an emphasis on the important role of language in such training (Villanueva & López), the education on human rights (Hernández), and the training in competences for the intervention in education (Jiménez).

Finally, another set of texts – not strictly linked to the dossier – is articulated around the issue of racial discrimination in education (Riobó) and in the mass media (Del Piero & López), sexual harassment in a higher education institution (Barajas & Ramírez), and the influence of occupational activities in the shaping of the professional identity of a group of technical pedagogues.

In the articles compiled in this issue of *Diálogos sobre educación* the reader will find two of the authors' main academic and political concerns: understanding some of the challenges that recent social changes have created for education, as well as the problems derived from the policies designed to face them, and the need for an education for a democratic society and the respect of singularities.