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The Permanent Quality Tribunal in Education and the Limits of Education Policy

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ABSTRACT The aim of this article is to analyse the evident use of the notion 'educational quality' from the perspective of a critical 'ontology of the present' by focusing on governmental relations. Through mapping present discourses on educational quality and related technologies, the authors analyse how our present concern with quality is part of a particular regime of government and self-government. In this governmental regime the 'quality apparatus' seeks to assure an optimal relation between supply and demand. In conclusion, the perspective of a 'creative ontology' of the educational present is introduced in order to formulate alternative ideas on education and in order to indicate the limits of education policy.

Introduction

Over the past decades, educational quality has become an important concept in various policy statements and is being introduced as the main justification for very diverse policy measures. Not only in Flanders (Belgium), but also in many other regions and countries, this reference to 'educational quality' is part of the way we talk about education, i.e. speaking about education and speaking about educational quality seem to converge. As such, quality assurance is what speaks for itself. Of course, there are, for example, discussions concerning the adequate indicators for educational quality, and the systems of quality assurance and quality management best suited for education. Because there is an evident concern for quality, this does not imply that it is not problematic. These discussions related to the 'what' and the 'how' of quality assurance seem to confirm once more that being concerned about quality in education is a necessity. However, in this article we want to question precisely this evident concern for quality assurance.

In order to question 'education quality' we will show how quality assurance in education is part of a particular governmental regime. The concept of the governmental regime does not primarily refer to the (nation) state or to official instances of the European Union, for example. A broad concept of government will be used to cover, on the one hand, governmental relations that are transgressing the context of the state and, on the other hand, different forms of government at a much more limited and lower level than the state level. Inspired by Foucault (2004a, b) and Rose (1999), we define a governmental regime as a complex of discourses, institutions, practices, procedures and methods leading and steering people and being related to the production of particular forms of (scientific) knowledge concerning people or human behaviour. From this perspective, the performance of the state is itself part of a governmental regime. The state is among other components forming a regime, but does not cover the whole regime. It is our argument that as far as schools, teachers and policy makers are part of a particular regime, they become 'obsessed with quality' or they become subjects with a 'will to (strive for) quality'.[1] Or, to formulate the aim of this article in another way, we would like to point out that with the emergence of a particular governmental regime, we are confronted with the birth of the 'will to (strive for) quality'.

Notes on a Critical Ontology of Our Educational Present

First, it is important to focus in more detail on the perspective and research attitude that help us to deal with the issue of educational quality in this way. Our research attitude is related to what Foucault (1982, pp. 231-232; 1983, p. 448; 1984a, p. 573) has labelled the 'ontology of the present' and which is, meanwhile, also applied (in combination with other post-structuralist approaches) to educational research (see, for example, Edwards, 2002; Ball, 2003; Fejes, 2005; cf. Peters & Humes, 2003; Olssen et al, 2004). It is not our aim to describe the characteristics of this attitude or ethos of research at a theoretical-philosophical level.[2] It is much easier to clarify this attitude and the related perspective by focusing on the questions that such an 'ontology of the present' helps us to ask and the questions that, to a certain extent, it also forces us to ask. The main questions are not 'What is quality?'; 'What indicators for quality are being used nowadays?' and 'How is this influencing education?' Instead, the question is: 'Who are we – we for whom quality is important; we for whom educational quality is what is at stake permanently; we who discuss continuously the right or adequate indicators of educational quality?' Or, to put it another way: '"Who" is in need of quality?' This 'who' does not refer to particular (powerful economic) interest groups having an interest in (a particular kind of) quality. This question focuses instead on the type of individual or the type of human being who is 'willing quality'. To adopt an attitude that allows these kinds of questions to be asked has some important implications, which we will briefly deal with here.

An 'ontology of the present' (Foucault, 1984a, p. 577; 1988, p. 779; 2004a, pp. 4-5) does not take as a point of departure the fundamental question 'Who are we?' in order to pull out immediately all the anthropological and philosophical stops to find an answer. The question is: 'Who are we as far as for us educational quality is something we can and should think about?' More precisely, this question is an attempt to take seriously the present, and 'our' belonging to that present. Therefore, as Hunter (1996) argues, it is important not to take as a point of departure a kind of fundamental principle by which the present could be judged and reoriented. Such a 'classical' attitude often results in criticising common conceptions of educational quality for being too narrow and in arguing that these conceptions reduce the whole system of education (to an economic and measurable system, for example). For this reason, we avoid using general explanatory concepts such as 'consumerism' and 'economism'. Instead, our attitude takes as a point of departure the premise that educational quality is currently important and meaningful, and it further asks the question: 'Who are those "we" who have come to understand education and education policy in terms of quality?' Thus, what is at stake is 'introducing a critical attitude towards those things that are given to our present experience as if they were timeless, natural, unquestionable' (Rose, 1999, p. 20).

Our analysis of education and education policy does not intend to reveal a kind of fundamental principle, a hidden logic or an overwhelming ideology, but opts for another perspective. On the one hand, we will focus on what is said and written today about education, and how it is said and written. This is the level of the discourse and the way it works at different levels. Through these discourses, problems are defined, diagnoses are formulated and solutions are being proposed. On the other hand, we will refer to technologies (methods, procedures, instruments) that are being developed, proposed or introduced to deal with questions and problems concerning education. This discourse and these technologies do not *represent* the reality of education but instead *create* or produce the reality of education. Through these practices, education is framed for 'us' and given to our experience in a particular way. According to Foucault (2004a, p. 192), through these discourses and related technologies people come to understand themselves in a certain way and, as a result, the 'conduct' of people is being 'conducted'.

However, this kind of 'conduct of conduct' or 'government of self-government' (Foucault, 1982) does not happen in a straightforward and direct manner, but occurs through the opening up of possibilities of action and reflection (and thus excludes other possibilities). Discursive and non-discursive practices offer schemes of interpretation for people to come to understand their behaviour and the behaviour of others, and to shape their conduct. According to Deleuze (1986, p. 84), these practices install a 'regime of visibility and sayability' of what can be discussed and treated – of what and how people can and should think about themselves and others. And this regime, as Bröckling (2001, p. 3) explains, asks people to understand what is being done and what has to be done from the perspective of a particular rationality (that is constructed within these

discourses). Therefore, this regime asks people to understand and 'govern' themselves in a particular way by submitting themselves (and what they do, notice, see, observe) to a kind of tribunal. Positioned with this regime, we are asked to look at ourselves (and the world) in a particular way, to submit ourselves to particular rules/laws and judge ourselves accordingly. As a result, the questions we have to answer are: 'What does the actual regime look like?'; 'How are people being asked to look at themselves?'; 'How are people asked to relate to themselves and to others as pupils/students, as teachers/lecturers, etc.?' and 'To what kind of tribunal are people asked to submit themselves in their self-government?'

In the next part of this article these questions will be answered by bringing together fragments of what is being said and written, and of the technologies proposed. It is important to stress, however, that this composition of fragments is not argumentative in a classical way. The aim is to draw attention to what is familiar ('our present') and what is often invisible precisely due to this familiarity. What is needed to achieve this aim is not a kind of (principled or deep) interpretation, nor a kind of story about the current state of affairs. What is needed is a kind of 'cartography' that 'maps' the present (cf. Deleuze, 1986; Flynn, 1994) or, as Rose (1999, p. 57) puts it, an 'empiricism of the surface'. And, in order to stress that our focus is the 'anonymous' level of the discourse and related practices, references to individual authors are limited.[3]

Components of the Present Regime of Government and Self-government

Students and pupils, it is argued today, do not merely 'follow' a course or go to a school or institution of higher education. They *choose* education (together with their parents) and this is, in many different ways, a calculated and informed choice. Moreover, 'to choose' is something that they have to learn. During a training course for students in Flanders, for example, it is claimed that optimal choice requires skills such as the ability to know oneself (What are my needs? Who am I? What do I want? What can I do? What are my weak and strong points?), to collect knowledge about the supply (the supply of courses, the labour market) and to plan and manage one's own learning career (Vrije Centra voor Leerlingenbegeleiding, 2004). Thus, students and pupils have to develop a calculating attitude in order to choose the object of their investment in an optimal way. They have to come to understand themselves as having needs and have to take them into account. And one such general need is to obtain competencies that guarantee a high income. With this attitude of investment, a detailed portfolio becomes an indispensable tool. It is a kind of 'wallet', including all knowledge, skills and attitudes that a person is able to 'employ' or to mobilise (Birenbaum & Dochy, 1996). Furthermore, a 'formalisation' of all prior learning can be of major importance for this attitude of investment and it may be necessary to 'whitewash' or accredit one's human capital (or competencies people have learned) for future education or for entering the labour market. With these kinds of 'wallets', students choose courses and each course can be included afterwards in the 'wallet'.

What is claimed to be helpful for this kind of educational investment is the organisation of modularised and competency-based training programs. It is an educational infrastructure that takes into account individual learning needs and the learning potential of the student, as well as the competencies needed within or to be functional for a (labour) environment (see, for example, Commission of the European Communities, 2002). A learning trajectory that is based upon modules instead of disciplines, and is thus objectified in terms of study time and study load, enables students to make well-informed choices. Yet, at the same time, this infrastructure enables teachers to monitor and control the choices, movements or performance of students. To inform, to stimulate and to facilitate are subsequently the new steering mechanisms for students who have come to understand themselves as making investments and choices. Furthermore, competency-based education is well adapted to specify the human capital (skills, knowledge, attitudes) that is necessary to have access to or to perform within a particular environment (for example, a professional environment) (de Rijke & Dochy, 1995, p. 20). And, in order to learn these competencies, the classroom should simulate these future (labour) environments, should stimulate (real-life) learning opportunities (for example, problem-based learning) and should offer useful learning resources. Within this infrastructure, learning contracts or agreements become effective tools to manage educational and pedagogical relationships. These contracts specify in a transparent

way the start and end competencies, the required learning and instruction process in order to obtain the chosen competencies, and other rights and duties (Elen, 1998). In sum, this kind of educational infrastructure is needed for students who seek 'to capitalise' their lives and we regard sustainable employability in changing environments as a basic need.[4] It is an infrastructure with tools and procedures through which students come to experience life and learning as an ongoing process of obtaining, mobilising and employing competencies in order to have an income. Or, to put it another way, a successful life has become rationalised as an optimally capitalised life within an environment for which particular competencies are required.

Moreover, we are told over and over again that in a knowledge society it is not sufficient to obtain a few particular competencies. What is of utmost importance is the student's 'learning force' or ability to learn (Ministry of the Flemish Community, 1997). Pupils and students (as well as teachers, lecturers and even schools) first need to develop their learning potential or the potential to obtain new competencies. The learning force is regarded here as what adds value, what produces additional value (capital and wealth) and what should be developed in an optimal way in order to move around in the different and changing environments in which people live. Therefore, the main task of schools is to help students to develop this learning force. Pupils and students have to come to understand this force as being fundamental for life – as what they can and should manage and direct themselves (Shuell, 1988; cf. Westhoff, 1996, p. 21). In short, what is at stake today is 'learning to learn' in order no longer to rely on others for the satisfaction of one's needs and in order to have always useful human capital at one's disposal. As a result, autonomy or the aim of education is reframed as the ability to manage one's own well-developed learning force oneself, i.e. autonomous management of one's own learning process is required to be able to have a market position in which the competencies guarantee an income.

Meanwhile, as teachers and lecturers we are asked to understand our tasks and responsibilities in relation to these ideas about learning and investment. Teachers and lecturers should provide learning environments that stimulate and facilitate learning (to learn) (Ministry of the Flemish Community, 1999). For these responsive teachers and lecturers, counting is an indispensable activity. Teachers have to analyse their strengths and weaknesses, evaluate themselves permanently (or accept being evaluated by others) and have to understand their professional self as what can and should be managed. Above all, a professional teacher today is someone who is able to look at what (s)he is doing from the viewpoint of the customer of his/her service: the needs of students, the expectations of the school environment, the questions of parents, etc. And flexibility and the willingness to remain employable are regarded as professional virtues. In relation to this, assessment and development centres for competency-based (teacher) training and training that is demand-driven fill in a new market niche (de Rijke & Dochy, 1995), for lecturers or teachers should have the necessary basic competencies, or at least have to ask themselves whether they have them, in order to perform in an optimal way for their customers in a school environment.[5] Questions such as 'Am I a competent teacher?' or 'Do I have the necessary competencies?' can be conceived as an expression of this new professional attitude. These obsessive questions are part of the management of one's (professional) life and are characteristic for someone who has a 'calculative' and 'evaluative' relation to the self. In sum, as teachers, we should have the ability to count and permanently take into account stimuli from the environment, for these can offer feedback on our performance.[6]

In line with this, we are repeatedly told that schooling (and institutions of higher education and universities) is a business that produces something and that students rely on educational enterprises for the production of competencies. As enterprises, schools need to acknowledge that they have clients (or customers), just as teachers or lecturers should acknowledge that they have clients (Bradley, 1993, p. 65; Kaufman, 1995, p. 6). They need to regard what they are doing as what can and should be managed and to judge their business from the perspective of the needs and demands of the environment at different levels: what parents and students need, the needs of the local environment or what society needs from all schools (and what central government translates into national standards). Institutions for education are thus framed as enterprises that produce schooling or offer human capital as their product or service in order for parents (or students) to choose as an investment. And, as has been explained before, an informational base is required for this

investment in order to choose the school that best meets one's preferences or (learning or knowledge) needs.

Finally, within this context, the task of central government is reframed as the responsibility to create and protect the infrastructure for these schools to perform and for the relation between students/parents and schools to take hold.[7] Central government comes to understand its task (or policy) as, for example, offering all students equal opportunities, i.e. opportunities for all students to invest in themselves through schooling and for all to have a 'stake' within society (Hutton, 1999). The point of departure is that the ability to produce human capital or learning guarantees *inclusion*. And along this line, 'enabling' governments regard 'learning policy' or investment in human capital as a 'social policy' focused on inclusion (cf. Giddens, 2000, pp. 113-114). For sure, inclusion is basically a matter of individual responsibility, i.e. each of us has to be focused on being included through a well-informed capitalisation of life. In addressing citizens as consumers, central government furthermore has a mandate to control the performance of educational institutions and to inform 'citizen-consumers' about this performance (Peters, 2005). As a consequence, educational policy functions as a kind of 'strategic management' that seeks to take into account the needs of the various stakeholders, to translate these into performance indicators and to 'manage by objectives'.[8]

The 'Business Ethics' of Entrepreneurial Self-government

The fragments of discourses, rationalisations and technologies outlined in the previous section have become self-evident for us. They are what we have at our disposal to talk about and reflect on education and teaching. As such, they assemble the actual regime of government. It is our view that this regime requires 'entrepreneurship' as a kind of self-government in order to be operational.[9] While the 'social citizen' refers to the form of self-government in the past social regime of government, the figure of the 'entrepreneurial citizen' or 'entrepreneur of the self' refers to the form of self-government promoted and stimulated today. Some further elaboration is needed here.

Entrepreneurship is about using scarce resources to produce a commodity that meets demands and needs, and offers an income. But entrepreneurship, as economists have pointed out, is not just a mechanical process of allocation and production. It also involves an 'element of alertness' (Kirzner, 1973, p. 33), i.e. a speculative, creative or innovative attitude to see opportunities in a competitive environment. Entrepreneurship is always a risky business. But risk is not, as in the 'social state', to be prevented, but instead is the condition for profit – a kind of 'stimulating principle' (Giddens, 2000, pp. 73, 129). Identifying actual self-government as 'entrepreneurship' means that people are required to look at themselves as operating within an environment and having certain needs which they can satisfy through creatively producing goods (for example, competencies). Even consumption could be regarded as an entrepreneurial act, since what is produced in consumption is satisfaction (Becker, 1976, p. 173).

People are thus regarded as being responsible for (managing) the production of their own well-being. In other words, the entrepreneur of the self (student, teacher, school, etc.) is someone who is aware that the self is the result of a calculated investment and that the 'success' of the self is not guaranteed as such, but depends on whether it meets needs. These could be the needs of a particular environment (a calculated investment in human capital through education or self-organised and self-directed learning) or the needs of oneself as a customer (a calculated investment in human capital to meet the need of self-realisation). While the 'social citizen' was someone who submitted him- or herself to the social tribunal (and its social 'laws' and 'norms') in order to be free, a submission to the 'permanent economic tribunal' is the condition for entrepreneurial freedom or self-government (Foucault, 2004a, p. 253). However, the meaning of 'economic' in this expression should not be understood as opposite to 'social'. Economic refers to the characteristics of entrepreneurship (needs, calculation, production, alertness, risk). Furthermore, against the background of entrepreneurship as a mode of self-government, social relations are recoded as the outcome of entrepreneurship, or objectified as the conditions for entrepreneurship: relations towards one's friends and loved ones, relations of trust and networks with colleagues are regarded as the result of investments and useful for personal happiness, social effectiveness and the well-

being of nations (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001). Moreover, and as indicated earlier, for the entrepreneur of the self, inclusion is a necessity since inclusion in an environment enables one to find resources that produce satisfaction or to employ one's human capital in order to generate an income.

Thus, according to Gordon:

> the idea of one's life as the enterprise of oneself implies that there is a sense in which one remains always continuously employed in (at least) that one enterprise, and that is part of the continuous business of living to make adequate provision for the preservation, reproduction and reconstruction of one's own human capital. (1991, p. 44)

Entrepreneurial self-government (of students, teachers, schools, etc.) or autonomy according to the *nomos* of the permanent economic tribunal aims at the production of human capital or at adding value to the self (for oneself as a customer or for others). And learning as a well-thought-out investment and a responsible capitalisation and mobilisation of life is the main prerequisite for the 'ongoing business of life'. In short, the 'business ethics' promoted today is a kind of 'adaptation ethics' with the following maxim: 'Do what you want but take care that your human capital is adapted and take care of your inclusion.'

The assumptions and scope of the 'business ethics' of entrepreneurial self-government can be summarised by identifying four components (Foucault, 1984b, p. 33; Dean, 1995, p. 565). The material or (moral) 'substance' of this form of self-government is human (and social) capital, and, in particular, knowledge or competencies. The 'mode of subjection' of entrepreneurial autonomy is the 'permanent economic tribunal': people have to develop a calculating attitude towards the entrepreneurial material and should, for example, find out which competencies are required or could be(come) functional. This substance and this mode of subjection bring us to the 'work upon the self' that is needed: one is asked to invest in human capital, to learn or to add value to the self and to find ways of productive inclusion. Finally, this work upon the self has a particular teleology: the aim is the production of satisfaction (through permanently looking for a suitable market position in life and investing in social relations).

By now it will be clear that the submission to the permanent economic tribunal provokes our present concern with quality. It is the entrepreneurial student, the entrepreneurial school or institution of higher education that 'deserves' and 'wants' quality. As a result, the entrepreneurial self sees quality assurance as a majot concern. This experience of quality will be discussed in detail in the following section. For this, we will again introduce fragments of the present discourse.

The Quality Tribunal

Pupils and students, as policy makers and principals repeat continuously, want quality. This means that the service they choose should have an additional value, i.e. the service should take into account their needs or there should be a connection between supply and demand. In line with this, it is expected that every institution for education should make its quality visible and public, and that an independent organisation should monitor its quality by using general indicators of educational quality (Commissie Accreditatie Hoger Onderwijs, 2001). This information on educational quality is required for students and pupils (and their entrepreneurial parents) to make a calculated investment. The ideal is that the supply should, in every circumstance, take the needs of the individual student and pupil into account. Moreover, the student also imposes this quality assurance on him- or herself. What is at stake for the student is to choose what corresponds and to invest in competencies which correspond to his or her own needs. 'Quality of life' thus functions as the general horizon for students' investments and choices.

Furthermore, as we know by now, schools and institutions of higher education should regard quality as their main concern. According to a former Minister of Education in Flanders, quality is the first and most important building stone in the educational system (Van den Bossche, 1998-99).[10] This is to say that schools always have to be prepared to take into account the needs from the internal and external environment at all levels. For these kinds of (autonomous) schools inhabiting an environment there is no longer a fixed norm of 'good education'. Instead, quality is the main target and this implies that schools are obliged to ask themselves permanently the following questions: 'What is quality?'; 'Which quality indicators will we use?' and 'How do the

indicators refer to needs and demands?' It is also within this space of thought that the image of the excellent school or university appears.[11]

Excellence refers to the best performance judged according to a well-defined set of quality indicators. Therefore, an excellent school is provisional (given the needs of a particular environment and the quality indicators being used) and relative (compared to the performance of other institutions). A school that respects itself and its customers is not only obsessed with quality, but agrees or wants to be evaluated and accredited permanently by others. This kind of information concerning quality allows the positioning of one school against other institutions and is a necessary condition for customers and investors to make their choice.

Furthermore, quality becomes a main target for management in entrepreneurial schools and, as a result, management can start to address teachers and lecturers as entrepreneurs or 'intra-preneurs' (cf. Pinchot III, 1985). They become regarded as people who offer a service and who are in need of an environment to employ their competencies. As entrepreneurial teachers and lecturers, they too are sensitive of quality, i.e. they look at what they are doing as 'producing services' and feel obliged to establish a connection between what they offer and what is needed (Morgan & Murgatroyd, 1994, pp. 101-102). It becomes part of their professional identity to ask permanently 'What is quality?', to evaluate what they do and to invest in themselves in order to optimise the value they add.

A typical feature of entrepreneurial school management is to rationalise the outside world as an environment. Within an environment, schools have a service to offer and it is the environment that judges the value of this service. What is ultimately at stake are judgements concerning survival and based upon added value. Therefore, it is no exaggeration to state, as managers already claimed some time ago, that school management should permit customers to impose the law and that schools should learn to love it (cf. Peters & Watermann, 1983; Bradley, 1993, p. 65). In order for an enterprise to perform, the product or service should have the characteristics that are needed by the customer (in order for the customer to produce satisfaction of his or her own needs).

What is being stressed in this context is that the so-called 'needs and demands of the customer' can only be taken into account when applying marketing procedures and different kinds of 'research on target groups'. By using these procedures and instruments, and by adopting a calculative, entrepreneurial attitude, the needs and preferences of the customer come to life and enter the school environment. And we have already mentioned that central government may act in this context as the translator of what citizen-consumers need from schools today. In Flanders, for example, national 'attainment targets' are justified by what 'society expects from education' (Ministry of the Flemish Community, 1997). Moreover, optimal school management has to regard customers no longer as being passive, but as being 'empowered customers' or active producers for whom consumption is part of their entrepreneurial investment in satisfaction.[12] As a result, students and teachers come to understand themselves as 'stakeholders' and 'strategic' schools try to include them at all levels and at all times within school organisation (Halal, 1986, p. 103).

What this short description of present discourses and procedures clarifies is that education is regarded as a productive practice (it 'produces a service') and educational/pedagogical relations are framed as relations of service (or 'production of human capital'). It illustrates that the 'permanent economic tribunal' installs a new way of looking at education and at what counts in education, opens up new ways of behaving in the 'business of education' and introduces new criteria to justify (as well as to dispute) what one should do in education. A major and permanent concern that emerges here is whether the service or product takes the needs of the customers into account, whether it has 'characteristics' that meet the expectations and demands. And it is this concern and this focus on 'characteristics' that open up a space to reflect upon quality and to start the ongoing discussion on adequate indicators for educational quality. It is a discussion about the properties, features or specifications of education as service. In other words, the installation of a permanent economic tribunal is simultaneously the installation of a 'permanent quality tribunal' (Simons, 2002). The next section of this article analyses the jurisdiction of this quality tribunal in more detail and in four steps.

The Jurisdiction of the Quality Tribunal

First, it is important to mention that a 'submission to the needs and demands of the customer' does not mean that particular customers actually make judgements. For management in educational institutions, for example, it is often about the 'viewpoint' of the customer. What is at stake is that not only schools but also teachers come to understand what they are doing from this viewpoint and start to focus on the different dimensions or indicators that function as the 'determinants of satisfaction' (cf. Demeulemeester & Callewier, 1997, p. 33). These dimensions of educational quality are only to be perceived when adopting an entrepreneurial attitude and when positioning oneself towards (actual or future) customers with needs. Questions such as 'How should these dimensions and indicators be noticed?'; 'Who is responsible for defining educational quality?' or 'Who actually are the customers of education?' arise as soon as the 'quality tribunal' is installed.

Second, it will be clear by now that with the concept of the 'permanent quality tribunal' we do not offer a particular definition of (educational) quality. Instead, the submission to this tribunal results in quality entering our present space of educational thought as a permanent concern and problem. It is the problem of added value for those whom education wants to serve. Therefore, the question 'What is quality?' and the willingness to know what quality should be about are already indications of the presence of an entrepreneurial gaze. Different answers and definitions can be formulated. The most common definition equates quality with those characteristics (of a service) that immediately meet (or 'fit') the needs of the customer (cf. Onnias, 1993, pp. 169-171). However, other definitions, such as educational standards or targets, also make sense within the same entrepreneurial landscape. It is even possible to use a so-called 'transcendent definition', in which quality refers to a kind of superiority or class (Harvey & Green, 1993). These kinds of definitions or these kinds of answers to the question 'What is quality?' do not derive the characteristics of a product or service from the observed needs of the customers. Nevertheless, they presuppose – because 'offering a service' and the 'viewpoint of the customer' remain the points of departure – that the (future) customers benefit from the superior added value or quality that is being offered.

Third, the present experience of quality cannot be disconnected from the experience of permanently having to compare and improve. 'Entrepreneurial qualities', for example, can only be determined in relation to other entrepreneurial individuals (or groups, organisations, etc.) and cannot be defined in an absolute way in relation to a stable norm. According to Bröckling et al (2004), the 'dictate of comparison' (and comparability) is part of the 'business ethics' of entrepreneurship. An excellent school or university (and an excellent teacher/lecturer as well as an excellent pupil/student) is a school or university that is moving around in an environment better than others; taking into account the stakeholders better than others; meeting the needs and thus guaranteeing quality better than others; and able to see chances to add value better than others. Or, to put it in a more general way and at the level of a national or worldwide education system, excellence is about performing better than others given a particular set of quality indicators. Furthermore, this 'dictate of comparison' is intertwined with a 'dictate of improvement', or the permanent optimisation of the quality of educational services. The search for 'evaluative information' or 'feedback' to bring about a permanent process of optimisation becomes indispensable. Traditional questionnaires ('Your opinion is being asked'; 'Tell us what you think'; 'What is positive and negative according to you?'; 'Evaluate the school of your child'; 'Evaluate the teacher/lecturer'; 'Give us your critical remarks'.) and studies from specialised independent assessment centres, as well as inventories of 'benchmarks' and 'good practices', become strategically important in order to collect this kind of information. Although these instruments and procedures are often assumed to represent facts, they actually determine what has to be seen and what has to be done. And this information on one's performance (cf. national rankings and international studies of evaluation such as the Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA]) is framed as feedback and welcomed to improve one's quality (through comparison).

Fourth, the quality tribunal and its dictates of comparison and improvement are closely related to the development of a particular kind of research on evaluation that becomes a discipline in its own right (with its own system of publications, research groups, etc.). The concern for quality 'authorises the authority' of experts in evaluation and the questionnaires they design, the indicators they define, the statistical programs they develop, and even the meta-evaluations they organise for themselves (Rose, 1999, p. 147). The quality tribunal therefore does not only stimulate ongoing

measuring and comparing, but also authorises the authority of experts and bureaus specialising in evaluation and assessment. However, as Bröckling (2002) and Bröckling et al (2004) indicate, it is important to keep in mind that this evaluation research is not to be equated with classic test research. Tests do not measure the satisfaction of customers, as is the case with evaluations. Someone who fills in an evaluation form, for example, judges the characteristics of a service and does not accomplish tasks that are supposed to be the articulation of hypothetical abilities (for example, intelligence). These evaluations and this expertise concerning evaluation position themselves in the space between the provider of a service and the consumer, and are authorised by both parties. As a consequence, the results of these evaluations always indicate in one way or another market positions.

The Quality Apparatus and the 'Will to (Strive for) Quality'

Drawing upon the short description of the jurisdiction of the quality tribunal in the previous section, we can now introduce the notion 'quality apparatus' to refer to a strategic complex within the present regime of government and self-government which tries to assure that the entrepreneurial self (teacher/lecturer) and 'entrepreneurial enterprise' (school/university) take into account the needs and demands of the customer.[13] This apparatus is an 'assembled' complex of diverse components in order to have an ongoing circulation of knowledge concerning added value, to assure added value and to shape the conduct of people (and organisations) in such a way that quality becomes a permanent concern. Examples of these components are: the calculative, evaluative gaze, procedures of quality assurance, discussions concerning adequate quality indicators or standards, techniques of (self-)evaluation and assessment, training courses in order to be able to make well-informed choices, procedures of quality management, etc. A closer look at some operations of the 'quality apparatus' within the actual regime helps to elaborate on some dimensions of our present experience of quality.

When speaking of a 'will to (strive for) quality' to qualify our present experience of quality, it does not imply that this 'will' functions as a kind of fundamental/natural principle and is responsible for the construction of this apparatus. This 'will' is not a modernised manifestation of an old concern for 'good education'. Instead, the introduction of quality (in thought and practice) is already an indication that changes have occurred in our rationalisation of education (its aim, its organisation) and our rationalisation of how we should behave (as teachers, schools, students, etc.) in the field of education. In short, it is the entrepreneurial relation to the self and the problem of the 'needs and demands of the customers' that give birth to this 'will to (strive for) quality'. Therefore, this 'will' is both an effect and instrument of the strategy of the quality apparatus within the present governmental regime: its strategy demands people to come to understand what they are doing in terms of quality and this self-understanding (and self-government) is used at all times and in all places to assure a connection between the provider of a service and its consumer.

What is often criticised, and drawing, for example, on Lyotard's (1979) concept of 'performativity', is the application of criteria related to efficiency and effectiveness to public services. Although in this article we do not want to ignore that the concern for efficiency and effectiveness is indeed overwhelming today, we do not think the application of these criteria can be equated with how the quality apparatus works. Rather, efficiency and effectiveness are, or could become, indicators for quality and, as a consequence, they can be framed *within* the quality apparatus. Or, to put this in a more general way, the strategy to justify educational institutions by checking the efficiency and effectiveness of processes only makes sense when these processes result in a product or service that takes into account the 'needs and demands of customers'. Similarly, the importance of performativity or the optimal balance between input and output can be (re)inscribed within the quality apparatus and can function as an indicator of quality.

Finally, it is important to say a few words about the operation of the quality apparatus within the broader governmental regime that Rose (1996) labelled as 'advanced liberalism'. The core of this regime is that government acts upon a particular form of self-government, i.e. governmental acts (such as facilitation, stimulation, informing and controlling) address people (and organisations) as if they are (or will become) entrepreneurial. Therefore, this regime is both individualising (installing and reinforcing an entrepreneurial relation to the self) and totalising (it renders a totality

of individuals governable) (cf. Foucault, 1981, p. 161; 1982, p. 232). The strategy of the quality apparatus reinforces this double bind of individualisation and totalisation. Its strategy seeks to optimise overall added value by enabling and stimulating entrepreneurial self-government that takes into account the 'needs of the customer' (and the 'entrepreneur of the self' regards the self as both producer and customer). This totalisation no longer occurs in the name of a general (social) norm (as was the case in the social or welfare state), but by making sure that every individual or every organisation is submitting itself to the quality tribunal. This submission is regarded as the best guarantee for the total quality of life or added value for the state as a whole.

The Disappearance of the 'Will to (Strive for) Quality'?

'Who could possibly be against quality (assurance)?' This question is often formulated as a kind of answer to critical remarks concerning the 'obsession' with quality and is rhetorical: 'For sure, nobody could possibly be against quality' or 'Nobody could be against quality, could they?' Yet, with our critical ontology of the present we have tried to indicate that this question can also be asked without this rhetorical meaning. Indeed, the concern for quality is not evident for us due to the governmental regime of which this concern is part. Instead of searching for adequate definitions and indicators of quality, we think we should ask whether it is not better to liberate ourselves from the problem of quality as such. We 'prefer not to prefer' quality; because our idea of education cannot be equated with offering a service, with an attitude of calculation and investment; because our idea of space cannot be reduced to performing functions within a competitive environment. We are of the opinion that, and as Ball (2003) also indicates in his analysis of the terror of performativity, the unease with the way we (as teachers and also as researchers) are addressed seems to be an indication of another idea of what teaching is or should be about.

However, taking this critical attitude is not primarily about questioning the legitimacy of the call for quality and of the actual governmental regime. Neither is it about rejecting too much government and self-government. Instead, what is at stake, and following Foucault (1982, p. 232), is the refusal of the form of self-government that is both the effect and instrument of a governmental regime. This can be conceptualised as an 'ethics of degovernmentalisation', i.e. to resist the politics of quality assurance by resisting the kind of subjectivity (the entrepreneurial relation to the self) it shapes (cf. Gros, 2001, p. 520). In short, it is the refusal of the kind of (entrepreneurial) freedom that is promised to us today and simultaneously an attempt to 'live the present otherwise' (Foucault, 1979, p. 790). As a result, what is needed is not only a 'critical ontology of the present', but also a complementary 'creative ontology' of the educational present: 'With new names, new objects come into being. Not quickly. Only with usage, only with layer after layer of usage' (Hacking, 2002, p. 8).

This creative ontology aims to invent new words and concepts, and a new language of education that articulates what is at stake for us today. As part of an 'ethics of degovernmentalisation', these creative acts can contribute, more precisely, to a 'governmentality of ethical distance' (cf. Gros, 2001, pp. 520-523). It is an ethical distance that limits the ambition and absorption of the self in tasks that are imposed (for example, on teachers in the business of quality assurance) and, as such, it disconnects self-government from government.

Although we cannot elaborate this in detail within the scope of this article, a creative ontology of the educational present could attempt to formulate ideas on, for example, responsibility, trust, the future and pedagogic attention that counter the present entrepreneurial rationalisation of education. One such idea could be that what happens between teachers and students cannot be foreseen and cannot be a matter of calculation and investment, but often is a kind of 'event' that requires an attitude of attention (and not an entrepreneurial attitude) (Standish, 2002). It is an idea to regard students and pupils as a future generation, i.e. a generation that is still to come, that does not yet have a position and that is not yet in need of something which can be defined. According to this idea, it would be pretentious to think that what the future generation wants is added value, as well as to think that we can expect added value from the future generation.

Although further elaboration is needed, ideas such as these could inspire or invite people involved in education to 'live the present otherwise'. And maybe foremost, these kinds of ideas may help us to have again a language which could be used to remind educational policy and policy

makers that they are dealing with an 'impossible' domain of policy because, ultimately, education policy seeks to govern in the name of the future generation and the community to come. And as a result of this last remark, the previous paragraphs can be read as an attempt to rearticulate the limits of an educational policy that meanwhile, and in the name of quality, no longer knows any limits. But whether we, as policy makers and researchers, are prepared to acknowledge these limits is maybe related to the question of whether we, to use a formulation of Machiavelli, do love the world (and thus the future generation or the community to come) more than our own survival at any price.

Notes

[1] For a more detailed description of this regime (and related to other topics) see Masschelein & Simons (2003).

[2] The implications of 'post-structuralism' (and the work of Foucault in particular) for educational research are discussed by Peters & Humes (2003).

[3] References to other inspiring studies analysing related issues will be clearly indicated.

[4] For the idea concerning the 'capitalisation of life', see Rose (1999).

[5] For the notion of 'performativity' and the 'terror of performativity', see Lyotard (1979), Peters (1989) and Ball (2003).

[6] An analysis of the discourses on 'accountability' and related techniques (although focusing on these issues from a different perspective) is offered by Vidovich & Slee (2001) and Ranson (2003).

[7] Rose (1996) and Dean (1999) analyse the 'enabling' and 'facilitating' state at the level of governmentality.

[8] For an analysis of this structure and the idea of 'managed markets', see Vidovich & Slee (2001, p. 432); cf. Ball et al (1997).

[9] It was Foucault who first focused on this figure of 'entrepreneurship' and the 'entrepreneurial self' in his analysis of neo-liberalism at the level of governmentality (during his courses at the Collège de France). See Foucault (2004b, p. 232) and Gordon (1991, p. 44). Meanwhile, these ideas have been developed further by Du Gay & Salaman (1992), Rose (1996) and Dean (1999). Also within educational research, these ideas have been introduced by Peters (2000, 2005), Edwards (2002), Ball (2003) and Edwards & Nicoll (2004).

[10] The importance of 'quality' is also being stressed, for example, by the European University Association (2003) to emphasise the role of universities in the European area for higher education that is to be created.

[11] For a critical analysis of the idea of excellence (in universities), see Readings (1996).

[12] For these ideas and the so-called 'household production model' in economic theory, see Becker (1993).

[13] We draw upon Foucault for the notion 'apparatus' or 'dispositif'. See Foucault (1976, p. 125). For the idea of 'assemblage' or putting components together that have been 'fabricated' in different (temporal, spatial) contexts, see Burchell (1996, p. 26), Dean (1999, p. 29) and Rose (1999, p. 53).

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