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VI Encontro Internacional
de Formação na Docência

6th International Conference
on Teacher Education

inct^e22
international
conference on
teacher education



INCERTEZAS E DESAFIOS
NA INVESTIGAÇÃO
EM EDUCAÇÃO

UNCERTAINTIES AND CHALLENGES
IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH



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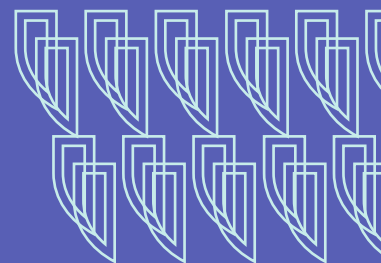
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Investigação como direito, investigação como comunidade

Research as a right, research as community

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Resumo

Na mesa redonda do INCTE de 2022, o tópico em discussão foi incertezas e desafios da investigação em educação. Neste texto são apresentadas as ideias principais de um dos contributos. Começa por apresentar diferentes significados de investigação para se deter na ideia de investigação como direito. A partir dessa perspectiva, a prática e a visão de investigação como comunidade são afirmadas.

Palavras-Chave: investigação em educação, investigação como direito, comunidade.

Abstract

In the INCTE roundtable, the topic of uncertainties and challenges in research in education was discussed. This text summarizes one of the contributions to the discussion. It presents different meanings of research to then focus on research as a right and how that perspective leads to a view and a practice of research as community.

Keywords: research in education, research as a right, community.

1 Introduction

In the 6th edition of the International Conference on Teacher Education, the roundtable was organized on the topic of uncertainties and challenges in research in education. A series of questions was discussed around the aims and value of educational research, about the stance and responsibility of the researcher and how research connects to contexts and communities – and to itself. The flowing of ideas and experiences was very rich and meaningful.

This text sums up my contributions that were based on the experience as a member of the Executive Board of the European Educational Research Association (EERA), but also on my work in Early Childhood Teacher Education in the past 20+ years. The organization of the text follows the structure of the discussion as it developed during the session.

Even if the interactivity of the different interventions (speakers and public) cannot be translated into text, the learning that was promoted for all participants merits recognition. Hopefully this text will have captured some of the ideas and keep the discussions flowing.

1 Aims of research and education: research as a right

To define or even talk about research, it is important to realize that concepts are not ready-made bodies. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) highlighted, concepts are created and their value lies in being put to use. So when do we use “research” as a society? What meanings have we attributed to the word? Research is present in very different contexts and at different levels: a) It’s a system with institutes and organizations, workers, awards, journals, conferences, etc.; b) It’s a professional area, a practice, that happens inside that system but also in connection to it in schools and other educational institutions. And some people are specialized in that practice; c) It’s also used to describe the knowledge that is produced in that system through that practice – there is research that says... there are even formats for this knowledge, thesis, project, paper; d) But the same word has value for describing pedagogical (or didactical) approaches. It is used in primary and secondary schools to assign value to student activities. Even in early childhood education, small children do research; e) Politicians and decision makers also use research – either for basing decisions or for supporting already made options under the umbrella of evidence-based policies.

Even if research is most commonly associated with high-end, technical activities, it is also a capacity with democratic potential (Appadurai, 2006). What these different meanings have in common, what lies at the root of the idea is the human ability to increase what is known and then use that to cultivate the human mind and society. This is a powerful core to the concept: produce new ideas or knowledge together with the expansion of the horizons of the current knowledge. It is never finished. We can always aspire to more (or better).

Research shares this with education: the task of shaping better planetary futures. If education needs research, research needs education if it is to succeed as a right (Appadurai, 2006): to be able to lead a disciplined inquiry into things one needs to know. This democratic potential of research can only be achieved if education provides the tools and the attitude to keep improving this elementary ability.

The alternative is a stagnant society, settled with its problems, excluding several of its members. This alternative also includes or is connected to the economic instrumentalization of research and education, the marketization of both, and the end of trust in education and in research and the possibilities they open (Lingard, 2022). Both can be easily lost under measurement imperatives. Instead of a right, research can turn into something available to measurement via performance indicators – regardless of use or relevance. But use and relevance are what research strives for.

Everyone needs to feel entitled to ask questions and comfortable with the effort involved in research as well as with its limitations. That is part of what research can contribute to better societies.

In education, this means acknowledging that all (parents, students, assistants, teachers, educators, stakeholders, community members, ...) should access education as knowledge

and as practice. For the research professionals, this gives us a responsibility to both make research welcoming and to recognize different contributions to it.

2 Research(er) identity in education

When thinking about who does educational research it's useful to find boundaries for educational research. One delimitation that can be considered is quality. The European Educational Research Association (2013) states in its mission statement that quality educational research acknowledges its own context but also wider transnational contexts that will have social, cultural and political differences and similarities. The mission also states that quality educational research engages in free and open dialogue and critical discussion and takes a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to theory, methodology and research ethics. This vision of quality is particularly important for educational research for its emphasis on context and dialogue. For example, even if it doesn't fulfill other criteria, relevant for other areas, practitioner research is a valid way of building practical knowledge. It cannot tackle all educational problems but it does acknowledge context and it is open to critical discussion. And it also contributes to research as a right.

Another important delimitation is if the knowledge that is produced is educational. Colleagues from other areas, like Psychology or Sociology, can make important contributions to the knowledge available in education but Biesta has already argued how that research is not educational theory (Siegel & Biesta, 2022). Research from outside Education sees it as a field instead of theorizing it. That research leaves translations to be made by teachers (or tries to decide for them).

On the intersection of both delimitations, two questions emerge: a) how education is understood in the study – Is it a complex understanding? A theoretical one? Or a short-sighted one?, b) what questions are being pursued? Are they relevant for educational contexts and actors? Or are they “solving them”? Regarding this, there has been a recent urge for educational researchers to problematize things that are taken for granted: not only to solve problems through research but also to cause problems (Biesta et al., 2019), in the sense of problematizing questions themselves. The larger participation of voices about what goes on in education would benefit from this opening of horizons.

I particularly like approaches that try to unveil how things could be, that expand the array of possibilities. Not just action research that changed a context or a practice but research that gives us new meanings to look at the world – and expands our horizons, making us aspire to more. This research does not look at contexts to compare them to what they should be doing, instead learns from them and gives back knowledge that has been co-created and can be relevant – or not. But it has been problematized and critically discussed.

3 Researchers' work in education: a sense of community

Ambiguity and uncertainties live side by side with strong claims of a single path, a simple solution. We see this in social life but also regarding educational policy and in schools. We tend to feel we are living in the most complicated times. What can we learn from

situations like the one we are living, and the ones we have experienced before, like the pandemic COVID-19 impact or other wars in Europe?

Tackling complexity requires getting people together to build solutions. Establishing a sense of connection and engaging in discussions are important. Cocreating knowledge is a crucial part of research. Conferences are an important part of that experience (Donlon, 2021) but not everyone experiences conferences the same way or has his/hers needs met by the sort of exchange that happens in conferences. Communities of practice or discussion groups have similar power in terms of supporting a sense of connection, finding common pursuits, collaborating for creating knowledge – both through learning and research. Unlike spaces that are part of the research-as-professional-practice, communities are on the border, mixing cultures and people.

Communities require a genuine interest in their purpose and the capacity (and time) to lead, support and participate in those border conversations (Vasconcelos, 2009) that are very complex. Part of that complexity lies in putting together different actors and perspectives without compromising their specificity. It needs to be an in-between, not a “takeover” by either side. A dialogic community is built on mutual trust and time (Flecha, 2020) and requires democratic leadership that acknowledges the relevance of the work being developed. But the potential for creation is worth it.

Conclusion

The seriousness of the challenge is enormous. Research and education are a never-ending process, an enterprise that will never be resolved. As we try to sort out the new developments, as we “cause problems”, we need to be alert not to lose the trust that is already in place – from teachers, schools, decision-makers, parents, educators, etc. But we also cannot lose sight of our values. After the roundtable, it’s worth highlighting that, besides complexity and specificity, we need commitment, passion, openness and wonder to be able to fulfill our role of broadening the hope for a better society.

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