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## For an Intertextual Reflection on Higher Education\*

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### ABSTRACT

The reflections that follow constitute the preface to the thematic dossier “Higher Education: (re) configurations of a moving field”. It is, above all, an intertextuality exercise, intentionally contained, in which the author seeks to highlight the most expressive (or with the greatest pedagogical, political or sociological interest) each of the articles was able to develop. Above all, the articles reflect important research contributions and the engaged academic stance of national and foreign researchers with significant insertion in the debates about the (re) configurations that the complex field of Higher Education has been suffering in the last decades. These are plural views that contribute significantly to understanding the contradictions and tensions present in this field, the ongoing movements of change and the multiple implications of the current pandemic context.

### KEYWORDS

Higher education. Plural analyzes. Intertextuality.

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## Para uma Reflexão Intertextual a Propósito da Educação Superior

### RESUMO

As reflexões que se seguem constituem o prefácio ao dossiê temático “Educação Superior: (re)configurações de um campo em movimento”. Trata-se, sobretudo, de um exercício de intertextualidade, intencionalmente contido, em que o autor procura destacar o que de mais expressivo (ou com maior interesse pedagógico, político ou sociológico) cada um dos artigos pôde desenvolver. Sobretudo, os artigos traduzem importantes contribuições de pesquisa e a postura acadêmica engajada de pesquisadores(as) nacionais e estrangeiros com expressiva inserção nos debates sobre as (re)configurações que o complexo campo da Educação Superior vem sofrendo nas últimas décadas. São olhares plurais que contribuem significativamente para compreender contradições e tensões presentes nesse *campo*, os movimentos de mudança em curso e as múltiplas implicações do atual contexto pandêmico.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Educação superior. Olhares plurais. Intertextualidade.

## Para una Reflexión Intertextual Sobre la Educación Superior

### RESUMEN

Las reflexiones que siguen constituyen el prefacio del dossier temático “Educación superior: (re) configuraciones de un campo en movimiento”. Se trata, sobre todo, de un ejercicio de intertextualidad, intencionalmente contenido, en el que el autor busca resaltar lo más expresivo (o con mayor interés pedagógico, político o sociológico) que cada uno de los artículos fue capaz de desarrollar. Sobre todo, los artículos reflejan importantes aportes de investigación y la postura académica comprometida de investigadores nacionales y extranjeros con significativa inserción en los debates sobre las (re) configuraciones que viene sufriendo el complejo campo de la Educación Superior en las últimas décadas. Se trata de visiones plurales que contribuyen significativamente a comprender las contradicciones y tensiones presentes en este campo, los continuos movimientos de cambio y las múltiples implicaciones del actual contexto pandémico.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Educación universitaria. Análisis plurales. Intertextualidad.

The reflections undertaken in the various articles that make up this thematic dossier "Higher Education: (re)configurations of a field in movement" focus on various objects that, in contexts of uncertainty, arise from face-to-face teaching and teaching mediated by digital technologies in Higher Education. Such scientific productions translate important research contributions and the engaged academic posture of national and foreign researchers with expressive insertion in the debates about the (re)configurations that the complex field of Higher Education has been undergoing in the last decades. These are plural perspectives that contribute significantly to understanding the contradictions and tensions present in this *field*, the ongoing movements of change, and the multiple implications of the current pandemic context. In the debate proposed in the set of texts, particular emphasis is given to the contemporary challenges faced by the university, which necessarily has to reinvent itself, considering, among other aspects, the new social demands and expectations, the institutional requirements and the range of dilemmas arising from the political and cultural confrontation, and from a markedly competitive scenario, strongly influenced by cognitive capitalism and the knowledge economy.

There are several conceptions that we can recognize from a diachronic view of the nature of teaching work. These conceptions can be considered abstract or ideal-typical models. While they do not exist in reality, they help, however, to understand concrete teaching practices. After the dominance of the functionalist view of the liberal professions as the paradigm of the (supposedly) true professions, and the criticism of the mimetic transposition of this view to the understanding of the teaching profession and its specificities - both outdated in the face of profound social, economic, political and cultural changes induced by contemporary forms of capitalism - alternative views, such as Donald Schön's conception - the teacher as reflective practitioner, or Henry Giroux's conception - the teacher as transforming intellectual, continue to recur. But, as the author makes clear, there are other possible ways to think about teachers' work and their university education, as well as the dilemmas and challenges of their social image and the valorization of their career. In this sense, it is also possible to mobilize concepts and perspectives that, while not seeming, at first, to have hermeneutic capacity when transposed to the understanding of the teaching work, may be instigating to rehearse, and ground another, less obvious, reflection. This is the case, in this article, of the proposal of an interpretative framework, based on some fundamental concepts in the work of J. Habermas and other authors, which is outlined here as part of a research project on **Teacher Professional Development in Emerging Contexts**.

The article **Politics and management of Higher Education, technology, and possibilities in times of covid-19** begins by stating that the designation of emergency remote education was intended precisely "to distinguish it from the distance modality", which, unlike what will have happened in relation to public higher education institutions, was quickly adopted "by most private, community and confessional institutions". The "resistance" that occurred is explained, at least in part, by the existence, in some HEIs, of a more "conservative" "institutional culture" in relation to the use of autonomy. However, the institutional forms mobilized to face the pandemic were remarkably diverse, and many of

them were quite proactive and creative in the use of that same autonomy. To better concretize this last situation, the article exposes the experience of a Community Institution of Higher Education.

The contribution entitled **Opportunities of the new educational space for Higher Education: third digital environment** proposes and develops a broad roadmap on the evolution of digital technologies, showing their impact on Higher Education, not only in terms of opening for our didactic-pedagogical and relational possibilities, but also in relation to the limits that these same technologies contain. On the one hand, "technology is getting easier to use, students and teachers are learning for themselves, but learning to write well, use mathematics, or think critically, remains as difficult as before. On the other hand, if it is not forgotten that "the figure of the teacher continues to have its intrinsic value that has not been compromised by technologies," it is also stressed that in virtual space "technology is invisible." This statement, which closes the article, leaves, however, a clue to unravel in future (and indispensable) critical reflections.

To consider education as a basic human right or as a commodity presupposes profoundly antagonistic conceptions and completely different implications. In limited historical periods, already well characterized, in which the demands of the capitalist economy could, in some countries, be (conjunctural) made compatible with the expansion of social rights, the transformation of education into a tradable good was more difficult to accept by society in general. Following the crisis of the welfare state (or the developmental state, as the case may be), and following the neoliberal emergence, this situation changed, implying a redefinition of the role of the state and a revaluation of the market as distinct but related pillars of social regulation. Since then, different processes of globalization (economic, financial, political, cultural...) assume and expand the neoliberal agenda across a growing number of countries. In this context, the internationalization of higher education and the mobility of teachers and students did not escape the canon of this new ideology, strongly interfering in the design of the dimensions to be valued and the objectives to be achieved. The asymmetries were accentuated when the resources and incentives, made available by the governments of peripheral and semi-peripheral countries, began to privilege mobility to central countries of the world system, with a view to training and socialization in Eurocentric and Euro-North American scientific and technical knowledge, to the detriment of an academic exchange that, while not devaluing this possibility, could be based on and deepen practices of scientific and cultural reciprocity, and collaborative research, aimed at countering the old colonial hierarchies between the Global South and the Global North. UNESCO, as an international organization recognized for defending a more humanistic ideology in science and culture, has always encouraged the latter attitude, but, as the author notes, its role has become more discrete and ambiguous, when one would expect a greater incentive for fairer and more egalitarian practices of exchange and learning. Thus, " it can be inferred that UNESCO's proposal is not only not contrary to a university model that could be classified as 'neoliberal' but leaves the door open for features of that nature to be assumed, even when the principle of higher education as a public good is defended". Perhaps this is why one can see in

this article unexpected convergences of UNESCO with other organizations, such as the OECD, the WB, and the WTO, which have contributed, more explicitly, to updating the theories of *human capital* and to meeting the demands of economic competitiveness, defending or acquiescing to the commodification of education, and thus contributing to accentuating relations of inequality between different countries and regions of the globe. As the author also points out, even if the South-South flow is already starting to develop, this is not enough to blur the South-North dominance. These are some of the questions very well put in the article **Internationalization of higher education: what underlies the discourse of UNESCO and the OECD.**

The knowledge economy can be understood as the set of processes that expresses or materializes, with increasingly broader connections, at the national and global levels, the relationship between the production of scientific and technical knowledge and the new forms of capitalist accumulation. It is a new face of capitalism - the cognitive or immaterial capitalism - that constitutes knowledge as an important productive force. As the university is one of the most important places of knowledge creation, it is particularly pressured in this network of relations that constitutes the knowledge-based economy, with important consequences in the structuring of its institutional and organizational objectives and logics, in the adoption of funding strategies, in the increase of partnerships with the business world, in the priority given to research, in the redefinition of interactions with the State, the market and civil society, in internationalization strategies, in departmental and professional practices, and in the very identities and personal biographies. The already designated academic capitalism expresses well the competitive struggles that are thickening in the field of Higher Education and that occur from the personal to the institutional level, and beyond the national space. A referential reflection on these changes - where, among other dimensions, the growing centrality of world-class universities as an ideal-typical model and inducer of these competitive struggles is demonstrated - is what Pierre Bourdieu's field theory proposes in the timely and stimulating article *Scenarios and challenges for the university in the knowledge economy.*

Before the current pandemic, when more advanced proposals with the capacity to transform pedagogical and institutional practices were discussed, digital technologies were often invoked. This happened, frequently, in an idealized way. No wonder, then, that some were seduced by cyberism that, as an ideology, concealed itself as an unavoidable alternative, the redeemer of all the ills of traditional teaching. However, with the pandemic and the various experiences induced by "emergency remote learning" (which, we hope, may be merely conjunctural and will never replace normal face-to-face interaction), teachers of all educational levels now have more arguments about the instructional and didactic-pedagogical possibilities and limits resulting from it. In this sense, it becomes indispensable to know empirical studies and to encourage systematic reflections on these pedagogical experiences and practices, and it is precisely for this purpose that the article **Curriculum and practices in Higher Education in the context of the covid-19 pandemic summons us.**

In research on higher education in Portugal, universities, as an object of study, have had a greater presence than the Higher Polytechnic Institutes. Perhaps this is due to the place that the university has assumed historically, and the processes that have built it as an *institution*. In the same way, when we look at the university from the diachronic perspective of long duration, we realize that, although eroding like an old ivory tower, it continues to sustain (and be sustained by) social representations that tend to differentiate it from other higher education organizations. But there are certainly many other reasons that have been discussed. The very (almost antinomic) divisions between intellectual and manual work, or between theory and practice, historically constructed, and so often discussed in their arbitrariness, have not failed to be (also) the result of a class induction, transferable to different levels of education, explaining, at least in part, the relative devaluation of training in higher polytechnic institutes when compared to training in universities. This was the case, for example, when, in Portugal, a greater dependence on political powers and local and regional interests demanded shorter courses to meet the (supposed) demands of the economy and the modernization of the country's interior, contrasting with the universities' prerogatives of greater autonomy, focused on research and longer undergraduate and graduate courses. However, in the almost five decades of democratic regime, some of the distinctions and representations between university and polytechnic higher education have blurred (although not as much as would be desirable). Therefore, the statement that the authors of this article collected in the interviews conducted makes some sense: "It is common to hear that polytechnic are becoming more and more university-based and universities are becoming more and more polytechnic. It is in higher education that changes are more frequent and, in this sense, for example, the decision that higher polytechnic institutes will be able to grant (autonomously) the doctoral degree is not far off. As far as partnerships and inter-institutional collaboration protocols are concerned, they are in full development, namely with Brazil and other Portuguese-speaking countries. But, as the authors point out, it is necessary to better understand the importance of partnerships, both for students and teachers, taking into account, above all, how international mobility paths are defined that can maximize the reciprocal advantages between the countries involved, namely in the areas addressed by the article **The internationalization policy of education in polytechnic institutes in Portugal and the partnerships with Brazilian institutions of professional and technological education.**

The article **Teaching and formative movements: challenges and tensions in pedagogical practices** shows that the experiences that have given continuity to the teaching activity in contexts of uncertainty have been lived in truly diverse ways, with "dissonant voices, policies in tension. And the field of Higher Education urged to reflection". In this way, while signaling the existence of pragmatic or conformist attitudes that admit that these emergent strategies are setting precedents and will inevitably lead to the increasing use of digital technologies in Higher Education, there are also those who "show themselves exhausted with the condition of dealing exclusively with digital instruments and yearn to return to face-to-face spaces". In an essayistic register (which only adds value to it), this is a text that enunciates a set of important topics that, necessarily, should be taken up again and deepened in other opportunities. To exemplify, I transcribe one of the most critical and



suggestive passages: "If it is undeniable the positive balance that there seems to be with the expansion of digital skills, we must be very cautious, because the idea of individualization and the greater facility to the global industry of education, already prepared for a consumerist relationship that interests the capital, remains. Indeed, the markets for digital technologies, in general, and for educational technologies, in particular, have long been in continuous expansion. Regardless of the virtuality of these new digital resources, it is also true that the pandemic has not ceased to be an opportunity to expand business and increase profits, even in cases where large multinationals have rushed (euphemistically) to offer help.

As the pandemic crisis frustrated or strongly conditioned many international mobility projects of teachers and students, digital technologies have not failed to contribute to mitigate some of the consequences of the absence of face-to-face interactions, strengthening the Internationalization at Home - IaH (internationalization at home) and the already existing research networks, or boosting the creation of others. In this context, placing the need for closer academic cooperation between countries of the Global South, the article on **Internationalization of Higher Education from a South-South perspective: emerging movements and contexts in pandemic times** suggests, very opportunely, that there may be reciprocal advantages, to be deepened in the field of Higher Education, that are not mere reproduction of hegemonic Eurocentric knowledge, and that are not motivated "only by the idealistic perspective of solidarity actions".

**In conclusion**, just one more brief note. The texts in this dossier, despite the diversity of approaches, reveal or let transpire many tensions, dilemmas and paradoxes that emerged or were accentuated in Higher Education with the pandemic crisis. But they also underline expectations of change in the sense of taking advantage of ongoing experiences to boost new pedagogical practices and other forms of learning, not forgetting the will to resume and reactivate research projects, the urgency to define more egalitarian internationalization strategies in a context of strong competition, or the need to consolidate networks of academic collaboration between different countries, with reciprocal advantages. In this regard, regional and national asymmetries are evident, also in the countries of the Global South, when HEIs are faced with the challenges of the so-called knowledge-based economy. How to equate them, for example, from a post-colonial/decolonial viewpoint? There are many questions that the texts suggest to an attentive reader. Besides many other reasons, it makes sense, also for this reason, to expand the debate, eventually with more empirical research and theoretical-conceptual support about the (re)configurations and challenges that refer, directly or indirectly, to the complex field of Higher Education.

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