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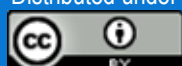
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Active Methodologies in conceptions of teachers in Higher Education: “a new name that doesn’t say much”?

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses data produced in a piece of research that aimed at investigating convergences and divergences between the pedagogical conceptions and practices of teachers in Higher Education (HE) and ideas associated with Active Methodologies (AM). The text discusses findings of a categorical content analysis of five interviews conducted between October 2019 and March 2020 within the scope of a mixed methods survey conducted at a private higher education institution. The theoretical grounding comprised research focused on AM uses in HE, texts about teaching and innovation in HE, as well as literature on the History of Education and Didactics. The discussion is organized around the following themes: trajectory in the teaching profession; planning and dynamics in the classroom; conceptions about innovation; and conceptions of AM. It is suggested that, although participants declare to have little familiarity with AM, which is, in fact, a relatively recent expression, many of the teaching strategies reported by them are consistent with the practices and theoretical foundations of these methodologies as explained in the relevant literature. Thus, on the one hand, it is reiterated that there is always room for pedagogical innovation in the sense of adapting to new contexts and demands. On the other hand, it is suggested that ideas around supporting the development of students’ agency have a longer history and may already be an integral, albeit tacit, part of the HE teachers’ repertoire in a way that is obscured by advocacy discourses of AM that stress their innovative character.

KEYWORDS

Higher education. Active methodologies. Pedagogical innovation.

Metodologias Ativas nas concepções de docentes do Ensino Superior: “um nome novo que não diz nada”?

RESUMO

Este artigo explora dados produzidos em uma pesquisa cujo objetivo consistiu em caracterizar confluências e disjunções entre as concepções e práticas pedagógicas de docentes do Ensino Superior (ES) e ideias associadas às Metodologias Ativas (MA). O texto discute os achados de uma análise de conteúdo categorial de cinco entrevistas conduzidas entre outubro de 2019 e março de 2020 no âmbito de uma pesquisa de métodos mistos realizada em uma instituição de ES privada. Tomou-se, como fundamentação teórica, pesquisas focalizadas em usos de MA no ES, textos acerca da docência e da inovação no ES, bem como literatura da História da Educação e da Didática. A discussão está organizada em torno das seguintes temáticas: trajetória na profissão docente; planejamento e dinâmica na sala de aula; concepções sobre inovação; e concepções de MA. Sugere-se que, apesar de os professores declararem ter pouca familiaridade com as MA, que é, de fato, uma expressão relativamente recente, muitas das estratégias de ensino relatadas por eles são consistentes com as práticas e fundamentos teóricos dessas metodologias conforme explicitado na literatura pertinente. Assim, por um lado, reitera-se que sempre há espaço para a inovação pedagógica no sentido de adaptação a novos contextos e demandas. Por outro, sugere-se que ideias em torno de proporcionar estímulo ao protagonismo dos estudantes têm uma história mais longa e já podem ser parte integrante, ainda que tácita, do repertório de professores do ES de forma bem mais ampla do que os discursos de defesa do caráter inovador dessas metodologias parecem sugerir.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Ensino superior. Metodologias ativas. Inovação pedagógica.

Metodologías activas en las concepciones de los docentes de Educación Superior: ¿“un nuevo nombre que, en sí mismo, no dice nada”?

RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta una investigación que buscó caracterizar las confluencias y disyunciones entre las concepciones y prácticas pedagógicas de docentes de Educación Superior (ES) y las ideas asociadas a las Metodologías Activas (MA). Analiza los hallazgos de un análisis de contenido de cinco entrevistas realizadas entre octubre de 2019 y marzo de 2020 en el contexto de una encuesta de métodos mixtos realizada en una institución privada de educación superior. Como base teórica, se tomaron investigaciones enfocadas en usos de MA en ES, textos sobre docencia e innovación en ES y literatura del campo educativo sobre Historia de la Educación y Didáctica. La discusión se organiza en torno a los siguientes temas: trayectoria en la profesión docente; planificación y dinámica en el aula; concepciones sobre innovación; y concepciones de MA. Se sugiere que, si bien los profesores declaran tener poca familiaridad con la MA, que es una expresión reciente, muchas de las estrategias de enseñanza reportadas son consistentes con las prácticas y fundamentos teóricos de estas metodologías. Así, por un lado, se reitera que siempre hay espacio para la innovación pedagógica en el sentido de adaptarse a nuevos contextos y demandas. Por otro, se sugiere que las ideas en torno a proporcionar estímulo al protagonismo de los estudiantes tienen una historia más larga y pueden ser ya una parte integral, aunque tácita, del repertorio de los profesores de ES de una manera mucho más amplia que los discursos de defensa. Parece sugerir el carácter de estas metodologías.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Enseñanza superior. Metodologías activas. Innovación pedagógica.

Introduction

With the expansion of the technological infrastructure and the popularization of digital artifacts,¹ education is confronted with a challenge in the sense of readjusting its purposes and methods to adapt them to a digitized and networked reality. Discourses that advocate the need for innovation circulate prominently in the media, in legal texts, and in academic literature itself, questioning and revising pedagogical practices with a view to using new methodologies as well as, specifically and emphatically, new artifacts. Put broadly, the challenge presented to teachers is that of pedagogical innovation, understood in different ways and, in some cases, in direct association with the use of technologies.

In Higher Education (HE), in particular, the call for innovation takes multiple forms. Teachers are required to integrate digital artifacts in order to meet the demands of a young audience that, it is assumed, has radically different possibilities and limits than those of past generations. By overestimating the new generation and ignoring that “technology often plays a complex and ambivalent role [in] the mutual and continuous construction of generations” (BUCKINGHAM, 2010, position 148), it is imagined that HE teachers confront a generation of “digital natives”, a “connected generation” or a variety of other labels assigned to young people who grew up already surrounded by digital artifacts and, thus, are assumed to be versed in practices of a so-called digital culture.

Teaching in HE, however, is an area that deserves much more exploration. Research in the area (ISAIA, 2006; VEIGA, 2006; MASETTO 1998; GATTI, 2016; THERRIEN; DIAS; LEITINHO, 2016; CRUZ, 2017, SILVA; MOREIRA, 2018) highlights, as a common problem to the public and private sectors, the absence of public policies and the scarcity of institutional initiatives aimed at the pedagogical training of teachers who work at this level. Therrien, Dias and Leitinho (2016) draw attention to the lack of financial resources specifically focused on research on teaching for higher education, criticizing the lack of institutional policies for consistent and permanent training in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the hiring of teachers based solely on their skills as researchers. On the same subject, Cruz (2017) emphasizes the complexity of teaching in higher education, highlighting that studies on teaching at this level of education are relatively recent in Brazil, and, based on a review of works published from 1998 to 2012, emphasizing the relevance of professionals and specialists’ initiative to direct the transmission and assimilation of content as well as didactics as an expression of the teacher's specialized knowledge.

Regarding the public sector, it is common in the relevant literature to find that training for teaching is neglected, since master's and doctoral programs emphasize the researcher training to the detriment of teacher training (CAMPOS, 2012; CUNHA, 2008). In the private sector, the problem is even more serious, especially in courses in which professional expertise

¹ We refer, here, to a conception “technology” restricted to objects (for example, computers and cell phones). Further reflections on the concept are offered by a vast literature that discusses, among other aspects, the issue of neutrality and inevitability of technologies in education (DUSEK, 2006; CUPANI, 2016; SELWYN, 2014, 2016).

and market knowledge related to the professions are considered fundamental assets, which often leads HEIs to hire teachers who only hold a bachelor's degree (SILVA; MOREIRA, 2018).

In this context, Active Methodologies (AM) have stood out as a possible “solution” to the problem of pedagogical innovation (PISCHETOLA; MIRANDA, 2019). The qualifier “active” is often used to highlight an opposition between student-centered pedagogical approaches and a “traditional” pedagogy, associated with a pedagogy of transmission.

This article discusses issues related to AM based on data produced in a piece of research that had the general aim of characterizing convergences and divergences between the pedagogical conceptions and pedagogical practices of Higher Education teachers and ideas associated with active methodologies. The discussion focuses on data produced in five semi-structured interviews and is organized around the following themes, adopted as pre-ordered analytical categories: trajectory in the teaching profession; planning and classroom dynamics; conceptions on innovation; and conceptions of AM.

The text is divided into four parts. The first discusses, using the literature on AM and the history of education and didactics, the foundations of these methodologies. The second part presents a brief description of the research methodology, focusing on the description of the field and the methods of production and analysis of interview data, also including a characterization of the participants. The third part consists of a discussion of the main findings of the analysis of the interviews. Finally, in the fourth and last part, conclusions and final considerations are presented.

Active methodologies and Innovation

In general, active methodologies are presented as a set of strategies that require the student to be more proactive, collaborative, and directed, in particular, towards problem solving. The fundamental claim is that, in this way, opportunities are created for knowledge construction with greater student engagement, which would leave them better positioned to be pro-active in their learning process. For Ferreira (2017), AM provide an opportunity for a dialogical, open, active and participatory teaching process, which, through curiosity, problematization, theory-practice articulation and opportunities for the resignification of concepts, aims at the construction of knowledge and the resolution of problems in complex situations, as well as the development of student autonomy, confidence and citizenship.

Although “active methodologies” is a relatively recent expression, their foundational principles do not constitute something entirely new, as Almeida (2018) points out. In the 1930s, Dewey (2007) already stated that school knowledge did little to prepare students for real-world experiences and criticized that school subjects were taught in isolation, disconnected from reality. In this sense, he emphasized the importance of consideration and respect for students' individuality and their experiences. In fact, throughout the twentieth century, developmental psychologists and educators – from Montessori to Piaget and Freinet,

among others – have focused on different aspects related to the appropriation of the learner's experience in the teaching-learning context and the role of discovery in learning. In Brazil, as Saviani (2013) discusses, there was a shift from traditional, lay and Catholic theories, dominant until the end of the 19th century, to trends centered on learning, which began to compete, with theories that emphasize teaching, for influence in schools.

Active methodologies, as the expression suggests, are usually presented in the literature as based on the idea that there is a (desirable) type of learning that would be active in opposition to the banking model of education criticized by Paulo Freire (1987). However, there seems to be little discussion about issues of a political nature effectively considered in Freire's criticism. In addition, the opposition between AM and a so-called traditional pedagogy can be seen as a forced opposition, since traditional teaching methods are also multiple (LIBÂNEO, 1994). In fact, the literature on AM does not always present roots or historical predecessors, while also frequently associating the possibilities of these methodologies with advances of a purely technical nature. This may lead to the common-sense association between pedagogical innovation and digital technologies, discussed below.

The ideas encompassed by various types of AM, synthesized by Diesel et al. (2017), are, in general, consistent with New School Movement principles: (1) student-centered: the focus of the educational process is dislocated from teaching to learning, with particular attention to motivation and the development of the learner's autonomy; (2) problematization of reality: AM prioritizes teaching-learning situations that promote a greater resemblance to reality; (3) teamwork: the learner must be placed in constant interaction with peers and with the teacher, encouraging them to reflect on different perspectives and exercise their argumentative and collaborative skills; (4) the teacher as a mediator who challenges and guides students, adopting a more reflective stance on their practice, in order to identify problems and seek solutions.

Based on these principles, different types of AM are referred to in the literature under a variety of denominations. Amongst them, we highlight the following: Flipped Classroom, Problem-Based Learning, Project-Based Learning and Peer or Team Learning.

The *Flipped Classroom* (FC) inverts the logic of what is known as a transmission pedagogy, exemplified in lectures. In a flipped classroom, contact time is dedicated to activities such as answering questions, discussion and debates, which stem from an introductory activity previously chosen by the teacher. This preparation may involve reading, searching for and/or analyzing materials, for example, and resources selected and/or prepared by the teacher may be used (Open Educational Resources, excerpts from textbooks, material on video sharing platforms, etc.). According to Zanon et al (2015), this type of approach encourages a more explicit form of student engagement with their own learning, from the preparation they need to do for each class to in-classroom participation in various activities. Thus, according to the authors, the classroom becomes a space for deepening understanding and conducting discussions with a higher level of criticality.

Problem-Based Learning is a type of methodology in which students seek to build, individually or in a group, one or more solutions to a problem put forward by the teacher. Its basic tenet is to use real and/or professional life problems as a way to stimulate the conceptual, procedural and attitudinal development of the student, facilitating the development of foundational knowledge and skills that are necessary for the competent exercise of any profession (MENEZES-RODRIGUES et al, 2019). In Project-Based Learning, on the other hand, students focus on creating a product, that is, they are situated as protagonists in all stages of a production process, including planning, carrying out the planned actions, developing the product and presenting it at the end. The project method is more specific than the problem method in the sense that, although both presume that a challenging question or problem be posed, Project Learning requires students to develop a solution in the form of a product. Highlighting some characteristics of this approach that differentiate it from other project tasks within an eminently transmission based pedagogical approach, Bender (2015) highlights the role of collaboration and reflection in a process that allows students to rehearse, with limits, the type of actions necessary in their future professional performance.

Another type of AM that encourages interaction among students is peer learning. According to Mazur (2015), the approach involves the teacher presenting key “content” points, followed by small tests, exercises and other activities, with the purpose of, from the interaction between students, encouraging them to focus their attention on fundamental concepts. In this way, the teacher will be able to assess the need to take up a particular subject in more detail and, perhaps, more slowly. In this approach, students must understand and explain ideas (and their perspectives on them) to their peers.

In general, AM challenge teachers to shift their focus from the specific knowledge of subjects to other types of teaching knowledge (TARDIFF, 2002) that need to be put into play so that the guiding thread of the process is articulated from the learners’ perspective, and not from the teacher’s. AM encourage a reflection on the meanings of teaching practice, requiring the teacher to carry out a continuous self-assessment of their work, verifying that their methodological proposal is adequate to the reality that confronts them so that, thus, they can make pertinent changes (GEMIGNANI, 2012). According to Urias (2017), AM can enable changes in students' conception of disciplines historically seen as difficult. From both sides – by teachers and students – therefore, AM tend to be seen, in general, as (perhaps) a way to promote innovation in education.

As already mentioned, the literature tends to associate AM with technology, in particular, digital. Of course, the possibilities offered by networked digital devices can enhance strategies that involve information search and evaluation, for example, and can support a more independent learning process, but they do not define or outline this process. The usual focus on digital artifacts and their potency contributes to restricting the conception of innovation in education to the progress of its technological infrastructure, as if pedagogical issues were solvable problems with the mere use of these objects. In this sense, the technological solutionism that characterizes much of what is said about the relationship

between education and technology (SELWYN, 2017) is reproduced, often having as premise the idea that technology is inevitable (SELWYN, 2014).

In fact, the term innovation has been widespread in education since the late 1960s, that is, well before the advent of digital technologies. On the one hand, different meanings have been attributed to the word throughout its history of use in the field; on the other, there is still no consensus on what it would be like to innovate in this field. According to Canário (2005), during the Brazilian military regime, the idea of innovation was embedded in justifications for major educational reforms, being conceived as a modernization strategy to seek the effectiveness and productivity of systems and processes. The author suggests that the discourses on innovation of the time were guided by a logic of tutoring schools, with efforts concentrated on the process of teaching them and teachers to be innovative and creative. In this sense, innovation consisted in a *top-down* imposition of a fragmented approach, which ignored the global and systemic features of education, in addition to ignoring the productive capacity for change and transformation driven locally by teachers and students (OLIVEIRA, 2015).

There are more recent discourses on innovation that build meanings related to the inclusion of so-called “new ” information and communication technologies (ICT), especially digital (TDIC), in educational contexts. However, the same technical basis, that is, the focus on the “rational organization of the media” (SAVIANI, 2008, p.11), has become a neo-technicism which, according to Freitas (2014), continues to support much of the justifications for innovation that take the form of programs for the insertion of technologies in education. As Messina (2001) points out, the demand for innovation has been put forth as an end in and of itself, as the solution to quite complex structural problems. Thus, discourses and practices aimed at homogenizing and promoting the reproduction of models, without considering differences, remained legitimate.

Peré (2016) differentiates the processes of pedagogical innovation and technological innovation, emphasizing that they do not need to be articulated, while Riedner (2018) points out that such articulation can be quite fruitful, as long as the first step to create sustainable innovation is to place student learning as a fundamental objective of the process. The issue of sustainability emerges as a serious problem in *top-down* insertion projects of artifacts in teaching-learning situations, such as The One Laptop Per Student program, investigated by Pischetola (2016). According to the author, in cases like this, it is essential that teachers overcome the idea that technology will somehow disavow them. For this, it is necessary to reconsider, in teacher training, the conception of technology, which needs to be understood beyond the usual notion of tool, a very problematic metaphor that reinforces the idea of the neutrality of artifacts (FERREIRA; LEMGRUBER, 2018).

Pischetola's position is consistent with Cunha's (2016), which highlights that innovation is not only about methodological changes or the use of technological resources. According to both authors, innovation requires a paradigmatic split, that is, a change in the conceptual bases that underlie pedagogical practice. Broadly speaking, innovation, for Pischetola et al (2019), is characterized by novelty (something not done before), utility

(response to a need) and, consequently, creativity: “it is the ability to constantly readapt the planned action to the new critical reflections that arise before, during and after the didactic practice, accepting chance, the unforeseen and all the elements that generate change.” (PISCHETOLA et al, 2019, P.139). In fact, these aspects are strongly present in the data corpus analyzed in this article.

Methodological procedures

The research was conducted in a private HEI in Rio de Janeiro, whose campus hosts a wide variety of courses in diverse areas of knowledge. The choice, however, fell on the institutional unit that encompasses the humanities courses, formed by several departments that serve a large number of students at various levels and house several graduate programs with very good or excellent evaluations by the Coordination for Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES).²

Fieldwork was conducted between July 2019 and March 2020. During this period, a questionnaire was applied (first stage) to initially survey the profiles and general ideas of teachers about the subjects under consideration, followed by semi-structured interviews with teachers who were willing to participate in this phase of the research, in order to deepen the discussion. The questionnaire was prepared in an online format, using Google Forms to create, manage and tabulate electronic questionnaires, considering that this format and tool makes it possible to obtain data from a large number of participants in this initial phase. For the elaboration of the questions, we started from the research objectives developed the form in sections that aimed at drawing a general profile of the teachers and establish the first impressions about their practices and conceptions about AM.

Thirty-three professors participated in the first part of the research by answering the questionnaire, and five of them subsequently agreed to interviews. During the interviews, the teachers were invited to talk about their training trajectory, about how they became higher education teachers, and also about what they think about innovative practices. Regarding pedagogical practices, they were invited to talk about their planning, their class dynamics and what they consider important for a teacher to innovate in their classes, in addition to describing examples of innovations developed in the classroom. The interviews, which were recorded and later transcribed, had an average duration of 45 minutes.

The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the institution (Report nr. 53/2019/CEPq-PUC-Rio) and all respondents who agreed to participate in the study did so in accordance with an Informed Consent Form.

Five professors, three men and two women aged 43 to 60 years, gave interviews. Four of these interviewees exclusively practice the teaching profession; three work exclusively with the HEI and two also teach in other HEIs. This makes the sample diverse and rich for

² CAPES is responsible for funding and quality assurance in Higher Education and Research in Brazil.

research purposes. To preserve their anonymity, the interviewees are identified by pseudonyms shown in Chart 1, which shows their undergraduate education, degree and area of knowledge of the disciplines they teach.

Table 1. Pseudonyms, titles and subject areas of the interviewees

Pseudonym	Description
Matheus	Bachelor in Engineering; Doctorate; Philosophy
Deodato	Bachelor in Biological Sciences; Doctorate; Education
Thiago	Bachelor in Physics; Doctorate; Education
Mariana	Bachelor in Marketing and Fashion; Master; Fashion
Larissa	Bachelor of Industrial Design; Doctorate; Arts and Design

Source: Field research

As suggested in Table 1, a variety of areas of knowledge are represented by the interviewees' undergraduate education. As for titles, four have the title of Doctor and only one is a Master. Four of the professors interviewed are part of the main staff of the University, and, in addition to working in the classroom, are also involved in research, extension and administrative activities, which is not the case of Thiago, who is part of the complementary staff and, thus, acts exclusively in undergraduate teaching.

The qualitative data obtained through the interviews were organized and submitted to a categorical content analysis (BARDIN, 1977), which allows the researcher to develop a model of understanding the object through the connections between the empirical and theoretical elements obtained in the previous stages of the research. According to Bardin (1977, P. 38), content analysis is:

A set of techniques for analyzing communications, which uses systematic and objective procedures for describing the content of messages, with the intention of inferring knowledge related to the conditions of production (or, possibly, reception), an inference that uses indicators (quantitative or not).

The content analysis of the interviews was carried out according to the following stages: pre-analysis, exploration of the material, treatment of the results, inference, and interpretation. In the first phase, the pre-analysis, the material was organized, and the work procedures were defined. A first reading of the data was carried out and, informed by the research objectives, was followed by a more detailed exploration of the content of the interviews, some clues were raised for the continuation of the analysis in the following phases. The second phase involved coding, classification, and categorization of the data. In the third phase, that of inference and interpretation, we point out the meanings underlying the data under analysis (BARDIN, 1977).

Findings

The discussion presented below is based on the findings of the last stage of data production (interviews), and is organized into four main thematic categories, associated with the pre-ordered categories used for analysis: trajectories in the teaching profession; planning and dynamics in the classroom; conceptions about innovation; and conceptions of active methodologies.

Trajectories

The teachers' testimonies on the paths they took to enter the teaching career as well as about their teacher training share a common point: entry into the profession does not include, as a rule, specific pedagogical training, and most of the activities considered as further education refer to studies, research, and events in their respective areas of expertise. In addition, the interviews indicate that this entry may have occurred for casual and relatively circumstantial reasons. Thiago and Deodato, for example, began their teaching career in supervised internships during their undergraduate degrees, and, only in the case of Deodato, it was a curricular internship in a licentiate course. The deciding factor for Larissa's entry in teaching, on the other hand, was her experiences with short courses in a Non-Governmental Organization. Mariana and Matheus entered the profession directly in HE, after a time in the job market and subsequent graduate training.

In the reports of all the teachers interviewed, the importance of experiences lived throughout their own schooling and training, in particular, the memories of teachers as models (good or bad), which is consistent with Ferreira, Freitas and Moreira's (2018) findings, is evident. Mariana emphasizes the influence of former teachers in her teaching practice:

Mariana: So, I also managed to gather teaching qualities. The ones I liked the most, the ones I liked the least, what encouraged us to want to study, what didn't. So, in this way, I was compiling these opinions of mine regarding the teachers I had throughout this whole journey.

Indications and invitations are highlighted in the reports, suggesting the importance of networks established throughout initial training as well as practice in professions other than teaching. Teachers, as well as co-workers, in addition to being potential sources of models of performance and behavior, can also constitute themselves through networks of professional connections that open opportunities for teaching. The excerpt below, in Deodato's voice, illustrates how different facets of teaching can combine in the construction of a path that leads to entry into the profession and contributes to the training of future teachers:

Deodato: I think today I also have this kind of brand, which I had been learning from him [supervisor] over time. I even offered some workshops in a project that he had in partnership with an NGO, and I also use some similar things in my classes, so some of what we learn is actually in the practice itself [of the profession].

Matheus' comment offers a counterpoint that refers to the problem of the lack of specific training for teaching in postgraduate courses:

Matheus: when I began to come across the fact that it is not enough just to know the material, [... he was a good researcher, and that had the knowledge, shall we say, linked to teaching [...]. I tried to seek help in various places, including in pedagogy at the time.

Matheus' statement reverberates the criticism identified in the literature cited above (CAMPOS, 2012; CUNHA, 2008), which points to a type of training in postgraduate courses focused almost exclusively on research. Mariana also expresses awareness of the impact, in her work as a teacher, of an initial training practically devoid of pedagogical knowledge and provides a glimpse into a certain initial insecurity, and also a form of learning in practice that marked her performance:

Mariana: So, I didn't have the slightest idea. The first day of school, I had a belly ache before I went in, I was twenty-six, I was super new, and it was a scare. So, I went! Professionally I did everything kind of like that, sometimes I took things and would develop them, sometimes it was bad in the beginning and then I improved, just as it is until today.

It is noted, thus, that despite working in different knowledge areas, there are several points in common amongst the trajectories of the interviewed teachers, from inspiration in the experiences of schooling to entry into the profession without prior pedagogical training.

In the Classroom

One aspect that draws attention in the interviewees' reports is related to the need for teachers to reflect on their practice. Mateus' words summarize the idea.:

Matheus: the teacher needs, in fact, to incorporate into himself a concept that is a classic in pedagogy, which is the concept of resignifying his teaching praxis in each class. So, if the teacher somehow understands that this investment is important, that with each class he must be thinking about how he is going to do the next one, what kind of experience that specific group entails, I think he is, in fact, doing the thing in the right way. Because then he will put in play the technologies and methods that, in some way, are suitable for that group.

In fact, self-knowledge and reflection on the meanings of educational practice are fundamental elements of ("good") teaching practice. The statements of the interviewees echo the indication of Gemignani (2012) in the sense of defending that the teacher regularly evaluates his pedagogical practices, updating them and sharing them with his peers. Regarding self-assessment, respondents generally agree on the importance of knowing their students, as suggested by Matheus:

Matheus: if it is the first contact with a certain situation or class, apply a questionnaire, create a situation in which they can introduce themselves to me beforehand, so that I can adapt my previous plan to that situation. And often I really change [my plan]. I had an idea, but I see: "this will not work."

The knowledge that is gradually being built by the teacher about his students is important not only in the planning of appropriate actions for these students, in particular, but also in the creation of a space to deal with unpredictability that presents itself in the classroom. This is consistent with what Pischetola et al (2019) conceived as one of the fundamental aspects of pedagogical innovation: the adaptation of teaching practice in a

context of continuous critical reflection, based on a capacity to accept chance and the unforeseen.

Another common theme raised by teachers is the more “traditional” lecture style classes. In the literature on AM and also, in general, in the imagery cultivated by the media around education, lecture style classes have received many criticisms, in particular, referring to the idea of learning as mechanical memorization, or to the banking model of education criticized by Freire, in opposition to the development of activities that have greater participation of learners. On this, Deodato offers interesting considerations:

Deodato: So, what I try to do most of the time is like, I try to avoid lectures. Not because I think the lecture is necessarily traditional, necessarily bad. I think even a lecture style class can be very good. But what I have noticed, not only here, but also at the time I taught in schools, [is that] you have the impression that you were able to cover more content in a shorter space of time, you were able to delve deeper and you were able to account for that content, but in practice, done in this way, this does not mean that the students understood what you have said.

When proceeding, the same interviewee points out that the important thing is to choose the appropriate strategy for the purposes of the class, since it is possible to fail by making use of other activities that are considered “non-traditional”, such as a workshop:

Deodato: if you realize that the aim of the teaching-learning process is for the student to learn [...], you radically change the way you think about your class. [...] I can do a workshop, suddenly that, well, is super interesting and all, but the students don't understand, are not getting involved in it, so that is not achieving the goal either.

When talking about innovation, Thiago corroborates this position:

Thiago: All the time bringing a problem, problematizing things, I can't all the time, there are times that I go there to the front and I teach a traditional class. (...) I can give this traditional class when I'm organizing something that they understood.

But what would consist of the skills necessary for the teacher to productively combine his purposes and his actions in the classroom? Mariana and Larissa highlight the “mastery of the contents of the discipline” and the inclusion of technologies in the classroom. Mariana's words, below, are blunt:

Marina: I think you have to know the material, obviously know it very well to **dominate** what are you talking about, and **now there is no way out** [emphasis of the authors], so bring technology in, for them to use inside the classroom, because... when possible. But I think that today, today any material, any subject, it is possible [sic] to place technology in the classroom as well in some way.

Mariana points to the “inevitable” presence of technologies criticized by Selwyn (2014), while Matheus offers a more thoughtful view, illustrated in the excerpt presented below, in which the professor suggests that technology can even disrupt teaching practice:

Matheus: you can use state-of-the-art technology to do the same, or even worse than you did before.

As for actions and practices in the classroom, the interviews revealed a great wealth of dynamics, in fact, consistent with the various classes of active methodologies discussed above. Larissa, for example, teaches several disciplines related to the planning and execution of projects, a foundational aspect of professional practice in the area in which she works (Design). In her comments transcribed below, she describes activities that integrate the strategies of staging or role play and gamification in a broader scheme of Project-Based Learning:

Larissa: one of the dynamics that we did was that we did an activity in an RPG format, so we did it as if there were two islands and Brazil, and then they were researchers who went to these two islands to identify situations. (...) so we worked six hours with them, to start introducing what it means to create a project. So, we set a question and then we made a simulation, (...) so they had to raise situations, and then there was a whole gamified thing for them to be able to score, understand the relationships between the contents. Then we had to produce the local newspaper, we designed the newspaper, there were the tickets they earned to get from one room to the other.

In her course on fashion history, Mariana also uses Project Learning:

Mariana: I divided the assessment in two stages. One, they had to make a prototype related [to the discipline]. Turning a current play into a period play by someone I spoke of [in the discipline] (...). Then, something else, I take these jobs and I use them [in a crowded space on the campus of the institution] to make an exhibition, which is another interaction with the department environment.

Another of the AM presented in the previous section of this work is the flipped classroom, which also appears in Deodato's comments on actions that he takes in the classroom from texts previously read by the class:

Deodato: so, as a rule, there is some kind of script that I prepare for the class, that they first do individually or in pairs, some questions to know if they liked the text, if the text brought new things, anyway, they do this discussion in this small group, and then join with another group, which sometimes has another assignment and stuff, and then they join the whole class to discuss it.

In summary, the teachers' statements suggest that they are concerned with the flexibility of planning their classes, using different types of strategies, including lecture style moments, and create situations that encourage student engagement and participation beyond what would be required in purely lecture style classes.

Innovation

When dealing with the topic, the interviewed teachers offer interesting ideas:

Deodato: it is not something recent in the area, in the educational field and in school, which is this vision that it is necessary to innovate, in this sense that it is necessary to change, and it is often linked to modernization and connected to technology.

Thiago: what is innovation? Is it doing something in a way that's never been done? Understanding innovation as something like: "next semester I'll do it another way". What for? Why? Did it work the other way? Did it not work out in such a way? I think maybe it's more important for the educator to be ready to try another method at the time they receive their students and say: "oops, they are not what I had thought".

Deodato, at this point in the interview, puts into play a conception of innovation as modernization associated with technology. On the other hand, Thiago suggests a conception linked to the idea of adaptation, which is a central part of teaching as a reflective activity that involves a measure of trial and error. Although different, their views maintain the connection between innovation and transformation.

Thiago's comment, in particular, emphasizes that innovation is related to differentiated actions, strategies and methodologies that promote a change in the conception of teaching and learning to the extent that it motivates students. Deodato's remark, at first, may seem reductionist, but the excerpt below highlights the professor's critically and historically informed vision, consistent with the brief overview offered in the theoretical foundation section of this article. In the excerpt below, the professor highlights that, although new artifacts may be interesting and useful to rethink teaching practice, it is necessary to reflect on the motivations for this process:

Deodato: I think it's interesting to think about change, innovation, thinking about how new technologies help us rethink our classes, didactics and everything else, but you need to look at a broader context, to understand to what extent this, in fact, makes a difference, or if this is just a marketing aspect that makes me attract part of a possible clientele to that. Or to what extent this, in fact, changes student training.

The interviews also sought to clarify the teachers' conceptions of what would be necessary for a teacher to become innovative. It is remarkable how teachers portray themselves as responsible, almost exclusively, for this process, as the excerpts below illustrate:

Mariana: [Innovation], it's time, it's study, searching for new alternatives. I think you have to have empathy; you have to be charismatic; you have to have empathy, you have to create a bond with your students. And not just be that person standing there who is only dictating information.

Matheus: Innovation, it comes in the moment when the teacher responsibly assumes an experimental attitude, that he discovers that the class can be great fun, that he can relativize that business, in the Greek sense of the word itself, put life in there. And that he himself feeds on that experience... Then he goes spontaneously to seek, he moves, he begins, in fact, to innovate.

From this perspective, the innovative teacher must invest in their further education from their own initiative, becoming an experimenter in search of new teaching methodologies and strategies, working on the development of greater empathy and cultivating relationships with their students. The categories listed by the group of respondents corroborate the attributes highlighted by Harres et al (2018), which suggest the characteristics of receptivity and openness to the new, as well as the development of empathy and relationship with students, as essential for the development of an experimental attitude. According to the authors, this attitude would be the basis for a teaching practice that values and mobilizes the involvement of students in pedagogical activities.

Professor Deodato's comment highlights the importance that the organizational climate has in order to stimulate and provide training opportunities for the development of innovative pedagogical practices:

Deodato: [...] the climate of the institution, be it the school climate, be it the climate at the university, be it more specifically the climate within the team closest to that teacher. That is, if you have a team that people feel safe to talk about problems, the difficulties they have, colleagues will help each other, and new ideas will arise to try to overcome problems that that person is having. This is also a very difficult thing for you to find in a given institution, because you often have an institution with a competitive environment [...].

Deodato points out that the internal environment of the University influences the willingness and openness of teachers towards innovation, reiterating the perspective of Harres et al (2018), who point to the importance of an environment of collectivity and stability in the institution. According to the authors, there is a need for an environment to encourage teachers to engage in broadening common interests and sharing challenges, favoring exchanges and reflection on practice, thus avoiding the reproduction of a standardized form of action.

It is worth adding that, in the answers to the diagnostic questionnaire used in the research, 21 of the 33 respondents claimed to know the concept of "pedagogical innovation". Among the answers to the open question that asked them to explain their understanding of the concept, the majority highlighted the question of the teacher's adaptation to a specific class or group, consistent with the statements in interviews, a concern with fads (a problem also raised in the discussion on active methodologies, as suggested below) and the issue of the integration of digital artifacts, in part, as a way of satisfying a demand of the "connected generation". In general, both these answers and the statements in interviews reveal a concern to maintain the focus on the student, reverberating assumptions consistent with the literature on AM.

Active Methodologies

As already indicated, a striking aspect of the interviewees' statements about AM is the idea that it is (or may be) just a fad:

Thiago: it's now fashionable, **in** [emphasis added], this kind of active methodologies, this very modern, recent thing that Freinet talked about in the 1920s. So, I prefer to think about the why of the action, I mean, Dewey was already talking about this thing, only Dewey was talking about more of an action in which [...] the teacher teaches using action. And then, we will arrive in Freinet, then Vygotsky and Piaget [...] they are all active and nothing is exactly this thing now. Putting the student as the subject of action is a very old idea.

Thiago's contextualization of the idea of focus on students is fully aligned with the discussion presented earlier and with the profile of the teacher, also a scholar in the field of Education. Larissa, despite having a different profile, suggests the same idea in her remarks below:

Larissa: so, the active methodologies, I think it's also a term that got kind of stuck as **the fashion** [emphasis added] and everything becomes active methodology, but I think it's nothing more than you making sure that you have a kind of, back in the past, right, thinking about the apprentice workshops – thinking about my area here, right – I think that the fact that the weaver has an apprentice, and this apprentice is in a practice with him, and the workshop situations provide him with an apprenticeship, he also had to have an active methodology of his own at that time.

Although the literature in the area (for example, GEMIGNANI, 2012; VALÉRIO, 2018) suggests that the choices of teaching strategies should be driven by teacher reflection, that is, that the use of AM does not have a prescriptive and instrumental character, the perception that it is a “fashion” and/or “cast” model of teaching can compromise the quality of initiatives to adopt these methodologies. An imposing nature would not be consistent with the need for self-evaluation of educational practice, with a commitment by the teacher himself, as outlined by Matheus in the following excerpt:

Matheus: [...] And sometimes I see some teachers adopting certain methodologies in a very conscious way of what they're doing, but I don't see any spirit there, you know? I don't see it... It's like the person is, I don't know, incorporating something that's not theirs, that they haven't matured... When they themselves don't really believe in it, right. I believe a lot in human beings, in the motivated teacher, and obviously intuition alone isn't enough, wanting isn't enough, they need to have access (...) But without the spirit of the teacher it doesn't seem honest.

In fact, all the interviewees suggested a conception of learning as a process that is potentialized by relationships between people, that is, they do not give centrality to resources, methods or objects, but to the subjects involved in these relationships, as Larissa's comments illustrates:

Larissa: [...] I think the issue of learning is in us, it is in the human being, in thought. So I like it when the active methodology is based on this practice of coexistence, of experience. I don't think an object is responsible for that, you know?! It can be the chalk, it can be the cell phone, it can be the tablet, it can be a video, it can be a table, it can be a plant, it can be anything. If you think that active methodology, is simply, asking the guy to see a video before going to your class, you are mistaken. You are giving the object the responsibility to solve an issue of relationship, of experience that is also up to you and it within that space.

Thiago: it's not a question of method, it's a question of the understanding I have of the human being. I understand that we only learn when I am emotionally, intellectually, involved with my problem, eventually also manipulating, but not necessarily. I prefer not to call it methodology in this sense, methodology I can bring to a something smaller, it's just a way to present it. But it's not the way, it's the understanding I have of the human being. The human being learns because he effectively acts in this.

The excerpts above suggest that resources, whatever their nature, do not determine learning, but rather the relationships experienced with or through these resources in contexts with their own specificities. Throughout their respective interviews, both professors suggest a role for the teacher that goes well beyond the mastery of techniques and the use of technologies. A pondered notion of this role is offered by Deodato in the following extract:

Deodatus: [...] it's a matter of you being able to merge different methodologies and bring yourself closer to the student [...] It is also useless for us to be that teacher who wants to be nice to the student, being close and such, and not have mastery of knowledge, think that content is unimportant and finally, do anything with students and [think] it will be cool. And the same thing happens with this issue of active methodologies, I may have studied this in depth, know several methodologies by heart, but if in practice, too, I use them and I don't think about the context that my student lives in, in what way that knowledge that I want to teach him, how is this going to be developed by him, or I don't think about the relationship I have with him, I don't think about the differences between the students as well, then I think that all this has to work together.

Deodato presents a critique of the trend that exists in some discourses on AM that relegate specific knowledge and the demands of the context to a second plane, in which a merely instrumental view of these methodologies prevails.

It is also interesting to highlight the interviewees' criticism of the use of *active* as a qualifier, which suggests the existence, by opposition, of *passive* methodologies or methods. Deodato's answer shown below is eloquent in this sense:

Deodato: I think that today, like, it seems that you have this assumption that you need to innovate, you need to change in any way, and this innovation today is linked to this idea of active methodologies, understanding that if you are talking about active methodology, it implies that the previous one is a passive methodology. Or that the student was passive before but is active now. (...) Like, if you stop to think that, at least, since Dewey, there was already a discussion of putting the student at the center, of doing and such. It's ironic to call it, only today to call it active methodology. And it is ironic also to think that as if at school before there was nothing active. I mean, a practical lesson, a field trip, isn't that active? The student suddenly does a survey in his neighborhood there, passes by asking the neighbors something, interviewing, making a theatre play, making a mock jury, none of this is

active methodology? I find it kind of problematic. But I think that's it, it's a very marketable speech these days, but we have to be aware of it even to be able to question it. And not to throw it all away, to think that this is a fad, that this does not bring anything interesting. I think it has very cool things.

Thiago agrees:

Thiago: I don't feel comfortable treating active methodologies as a pole in opposition to all other ways of doing pedagogy. But, if you want a characteristic that seems important to me in some perspectives of active methodology, I would say that it is to believe that you learn by doing, by doing and thinking about how and why you do something. Doing and thinking. I'm talking about one of the actions we develop of doing with our head and thinking with our hands.

Thiago points to the limited conception of the student's role in the lecture, as if reception could be a "passive" process, that is, a contradiction in terms. Often, the discourses of defense of AM situate them as the only way to position the student at the center of the teaching-learning process, from their power to remove him from a supposed position of "passivity". However, as indicated in the previous section, the teaching strategies used by the interviewees include, in addition to the lectures, workshops, projects, group work, directed studies and many other didactic techniques listed in descriptions of different active methodologies, even if the teachers do not qualify what they do as AM.

The relationship between AM and innovation was also represented in a thoughtful way in the interviews, as illustrated by Deodato's speech:

Deodato: (...), but like, it is not to use, change or use a new methodology simply for the sake of using it, right. I think you always have to reflect on the limitations of your practice to think about what I'm going to change, to do differently.

In general, the professors revealed that they already had some knowledge of AM, and use terms common to those found in the literature on the subject. Some of these terms circulate in the institution from occasional (non-compulsory) training initiatives that aim to promote pedagogical innovation, but they are mostly traditional didactic techniques in different areas of knowledge (for example, the "atelier" in Design and the "debate" in philosophy).

Final Comments

This paper discussed theoretical-pedagogical conceptions of a group of five teachers from a private HE institution, identifying convergences and divergences between them and ideas relevant to active methodologies. The focus or centering on the student, a fundamental notion of AM, permeated all the interviews and, thus, seems to constitute a cardinal point for the teachers. In other words, the statements of these teachers reveal a great concern with the quality of the work they do and, specifically, with the adequacy of their performance with their students.

The discussion also highlighted the idea of innovation as something related to the necessary adaptation to the exercise of teaching centered on the learner, supported by reflection on the practice and, ideally, the sharing of this practice among peers, in a favorable institutional environment. In general, a certain sobriety was observed in relation to the exaggerated statements made about these methodologies, especially of their being a novelty and their association with digital technologies.

It is important to recognize that, as the data excerpts suggest, teachers reflect on their practice and already conduct interesting and valuable initiatives, and it would be simplistic to oppose an idea of “traditional” pedagogy to AM, as if teachers who do not explicitly adopt these methodologies did not know how to teach. Although the discussion about active methodologies highlights interesting aspects of the teaching and learning process, its principles are not entirely new and already support the way of thinking and working of the interviewed teachers. We believe that it is necessary to recognize, more broadly and deeply, the historical rooting of the premises that support AM, as well as the, in some cases, wealth of teaching practices adopted in different areas of knowledge.

It is also worth highlighting the specificity of the research field explored in the research reported herein. In this context, reflection, criticism, and discussion with peers are integral elements of the “institutional climate”, as one of our participants expressed, which favors and strengthens teaching autonomy, preserved in an entirely academic management structure and, thus, quite distinct from the “professional” management of most private institutions, particularly for-profit ones. Yet, perhaps it is not an unfounded generalization to imagine that, at least, general terms of the vocabulary characteristic of the discussion on AM have already been absorbed by a significant portion of the teaching staff in the country, in part because the offer of courses and “training” in the area is considerable and, in fact, has intensified since the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

One of the most eloquent statements offered by one of the professors participating in the research inspired the title of this article: ‘would active methodologies be “a new name that, in itself, says nothing”?’’. The findings discussed here indicate that ideas around providing stimulus to the activity and proactiveness of students, central to the AM, can already be an integral, albeit tacit, part of the theoretical-methodological repertoire of HE teachers in a much broader way than the discourses that defend these methodologies seem to suggest.

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