

Presentation note

Higher Education Pedagogy

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This seventh edition of the *Sísifo* journal dedicates its dossier to *Higher Education Pedagogy* in a way to share some of the works carried out in this field by the Education Sciences R&D Unit of the University of Lisbon.

Pedagogy is herein regarded as one of the Education Sciences claiming the study of the educational phenomenon in its intrinsic singularity as its specific object, which can not be mistaken with common perspectives on Pedagogy as restricted to the field of professional expertise or merely associated to formal teaching and learning processes.

During the 20th century, Education became the study object of several human and social sciences, mainly Psychology and Sociology, which has blurred the specificity of the educational phenomenon and delayed the construction of “Education” as the scientific object of Pedagogy, therefore postponing its emancipation as a science and keeping it too closely connoted to intuition and philosophic reflection, to art or even policy. As it is well known there is no abundance of research works dealing with the specificity of the educational phenomenon, envisaged as a specific object liable to be described with precision.

In this edition, our purpose is to highlight the scientific legitimacy of the pedagogic perspective. Nowadays, scientific studies on education must include an approach which analyses the intrinsic problems of educational practice through specific lenses, describing it from the inside to the outside, avoiding parcelisation into knowledge domains and respecting its complexity and globality. By emphasizing

the need to open up to the emergence of specific issues, we are not meaning that other approaches should be abandoned or depreciated. The educational phenomenon is multi-referential, allowing for different and complementary frameworks: it is historical, it is social, it is psychological, it is antropological... The complexity of such a phenomenon can neither be restricted to any of these dimensions nor even to the whole of the parcelar systems of reference one can rely upon to get elucidation.

Since the last decades of the 20th century there has been a remarkable growth of research on higher education. Significant changes have been calling the attention of the scientific community to specific issues related to this educational level with special reference to the governance of Universities, to the University “new student” and to pedagogic concerns mainly direct to the first grades of higher education cycles and to the pedagogic development of its teaching staff. As regards research approaches of pedagogic nature, promising research networks and specialized scientific reviews have recently emerged. A mere search in the ERIC database using the descriptor *higher education pedagogy* shows an increase in published articles, from 32 in the period 1971-1980 to 179 and 801, respectively, in the following two decades and to 1023 in the period 2001-2008, which means there are 32 times more publications in the last 37 years than in the preceding period.

In Europe, a context swept by reform intents derived from the Bologna Declaration, there is a steady growth in the publication of dissertations and

theses dealing with higher education. This same trend is also visible in Portugal.

Recenseable works focusing on pedagogic issues are increasingly numerous and take different points of view: either the student (his/her motivations, concerns and interests, failure and dropout rates, and learning styles, among other issues); or the teaching practice (pedagogic preparation and professional development of the teaching staff), or even the teaching and learning process (groundbases, conception and design, coaching and tutoring, pedagogic relation required by new teaching and learning patterns, learning strategies and evaluation).

The articles included in this dossier belong on this agenda of higher education pedagogy as a research field and stem from the work carried out within one of the research lines with history in the FPCE-UL which grounded the creation in 2003 of a Master's programme in Higher Education Pedagogy.

The first four texts focus on student-centered issues. Helena Marchand deals with the intellectual and ethical development of higher education students, provides research outcomes, identifies their impact on the attainment of higher education objectives and proposes some strategies targeted to the activation of students' intellectual development. Students' adaptation to the course and to working patterns in the University is the core interest of the studies carried out by Teresa Albuquerque and Isabel Duarte. Finally, António Duarte's text focuses on student approaches to learning and their expression in learning situations involving *e-learning*.

The following three articles deal with themes related to the teaching and learning process. Sara Bahia describes a study on the analysis of creativity indicators in higher education students, which leads her to formulate recommendations concerning the stimulation of students' creative potential. The collective text penned by M^a Aurora Rodríguez Borrego, Julia Boronat Mundina, and Isabel Freire comprises three experiences implemented in University nursing courses, which have been studied through action research procedures based on the

use of learning strategies aimed at promoting responsibility. Tutoring as a major element of the academic model supposed to configure the Bologna Process is the core object of the third article inserted in this category and authored by Ana Margarida Veiga Simão, Assunção Flores, Sandra Fernandes and Célia Figueira.

The teacher-focused pedagogic perspective is here analysed in four studies. The first is also collective and it is authored by Maria Teresa Estrela, Joana Marques, Francisco Cordeiro Alves, and Mariana Feio. It questions the need to improve ethical and deontological awareness among higher education staff. Manuela Esteves characterizes higher education pedagogy in terms of aims, policies, and social requirements imposed on this educational level, paying special attention to the role of higher education in the construction of the knowledge society and to learner-centred teaching as a condition for pedagogical excellence. The pedagogical preparation of higher education staff involved in medical education is the central theme of an article penned by Patrícia Rosado Pinto where she highlights emerging issues like leadership, teacher commitment to their own continuous development, creation of professional development programmes and the existence of training structures in the institutions. At last, Sandra Graça broaches the theme of professional development of higher education staff for the first time in Portugal.

Extra dossier, Célia Figueira provides a critical review of the work *Professional Development. Lifelong Learning Sector: Mentoring* by Susan Wallace and Jonathan Gravells [2005, Exeter: Learning Matters], reminding us the need to value and credibilize mentoring programmes meant to promote the autonomy and personal/professional development of those who "learn" an activity requiring frequent adjustments to new challenges.

Translated by Filomena Matos