

Autonomies and dependencies in the educational research field in Portugal

JOSÉ ALBERTO CORREIA

correia@fpce.up.pt

University of Porto

JOÃO CAMELO

caramelo@fpce.up.pt

University of Porto

ABSTRACT:

The recent changes in the field of research in education in Portugal are analyzed on the basis of an analytical model that emphasizes the interactive and tense dynamics that educational sciences establish with the fields where politics and militant narratives in education are produced. The identification of trends in the field of research in education for the development of a self-centred autonomy is critically dealt through the proposal for an alternative which emphasizes the need to deepen an hetero-determined autonomy as a condition for the production of a educational scientificity giving a particular attention to the social destination of products and processes of research.

KEYWORDS:

Educational research, Scientificity in education, Citizen science, Hetero-determined autonomy.

INTRODUCTION

In the past 10 years the field of educational research in Portugal has undergone profound changes. These transformations were apparently justified by the need to consolidate a scientific community through the development of mechanisms of circulating information in its interior, through its internationalisation, and mainly by introducing quality control procedures where a strong relationship is established between assessment and funding. The establishment of more dense and regular relations between the structures of research and post-graduate training, whereby the development of the latter would depend on the assessment of the former, is the crowning moment of this process that becomes enrooted trying to uniform styles of research and scientific writing implemented in the training of young researchers.

One could say, to paraphrase Thomas Khun (2008), that these changes would allow symbolically the affirmation of Education Sciences as paradigmatic sciences, and consequently lead them to abandon its status as pre-paradigmatic sciences, or, in a more positive sense, to abandon its multi-paradigmatic sciences status.

But, if on the surface we can attribute this status to the transformations, at a deeper level they bring about profound changes and weaken the relations that education sciences maintain with other social spheres where legitimate narratives on education are produced.

In this work, after outlining an analytical model to understand the interactive dynamics that the scientificity in education establishes with the social fields that produce the “political narratives” and the “militant narratives” in education, we aim to describe the current transformations of the research field taking into account the trends to weaken these dynamics that do not necessarily lead to the strengthening of the autonomy of the research field. At the end of this work we develop the notion of hetero-determined autonomy in order to map out some reference points able to highlight the importance that research in education should attribute to the networks of dependencies which, from an emancipatory perspective, should be taken into account to attribute added importance to the social destination of the products and processes of research.

FROM ESSENTIALIST CONCEPTIONS TO THE INTERACTIVE DYNAMICS OF THE PRODUCTION OF SCIENTIFICITY IN THE EDUCATION FIELD

One of the most striking characteristics of the scientificity production process in education lies in the fact that it is impossible, in its interior, to make a definitive distinction between the discourse of the facts and the discourse of opinions, or a clear distinction between the empirical objects and specific theories of each of the disciplinary areas it encompasses.

In a previous work that we published in the

1990s we emphasised the idea that, for this reason, educational scientificity is undeniably a crossbreeding production. Its crossbreeding nature results either of its theoretical and epistemological stance, either from the fact that its scientificity is socially produced in a discursive space marked by an undeniable heterogeneity. In this space, the education sciences, without having guaranteed, a priori, an added cognitive legitimacy, are involved in complex processes of legitimisation where its capacity to articulate diverse narrative orders, several regimes of controversy, plays a major role.

This controversial way of existing of education sciences incorporates a large potential in what regards the diversification of its procedures and products. It simultaneously recalls that the production of an relative autonomy of Education Sciences cannot economise a reflection regarding its regime of epistemological instability, nor can it economise a conceptualisation of its autonomy where one takes into account the management of its inter-determinations with the spaces where the narratives on and about education are produced.

The essentialist conceptions of the science that view it as a “thing” or as a cognitive regime absolutely different from all others, do not appear to be heuristically pertinent for the analysis of a scientific field that, according to some work within the scope of the sociology of science, is structured by analytically inserting itself into a device that brings cognitive relations and socio-institutional relations together into a relationship. Therefore it is important to deepen a more reticular and interactive conception of educational scientificity, able to incorporate in our analysis the determinations and the logic of its ties to the fields it is closely related to, simultaneously contributing to structuring and being structured by these fields.

In the heuristic model that we now outline we admit that the autonomy of the educational scientificity cannot be confused with a self-determination safeguarded by the use, agreed to a greater or lesser extent, of epistemological models, theoretical systems and technical-methodological procedures. We also postulate that this autonomy is not a state but a process, in part hetero-determined, which acquires specific configurations according to the management of its ties both with the field of pedagogical

militancy and with the political field — to a large extent structured around the figure of technocratic expertise — and with the set of devices that ensure a broad dissemination of its processes and products. The two main fields (militancy field and political field) maintain tense relations with the educational scientificity and with the cognitions produced, while the scientific dissemination devices play an important role in the structuring of the public that the research is geared towards, i.e. in the construction of its public spaces, strongly influencing the medium and the narrative structure of the texts considered acceptable.

The existence of tense relations between the fields of scientificity, politics and militancy cannot be attributed only to the fact that these fields are structured around specific mindsets and that they all tend to be involved in a conflictive situation attempting to stabilise specific modes of education definition. In effect, the specificities of each of the fields and the differentiated way that they legitimately define education — and therefore legitimise their own existence as a specific field — structures and is structured by the reasoning privileged by each of the fields and by the main references of their narratives. This does not mean, however, that each of the fields does not have a specific philosophy that structures the relationships established with the other ones.

In truth, the field of pedagogical militancy is especially propitious in acknowledging the legitimacy of utopian (or projected) rationalities, which are linked essentially to the production of educational narratives that intend to be ethical and civically fair in education. As for the political field, without discarding its references to social justice, it is especially permeable to criteria of instrumental legitimacy. The tense relations that these fields establish with the scientific field derive in part from the tendency of science to ideally structure itself around cognitive rationality, occupied in the legitimacy of its own discourse and with the widespread dissemination of its products.

The rationalities produced in the different fields and its specific grammars for structuring the educational narratives are here analytically viewed as ideal types. The existence of these narratives in the narrative space of education has a hybrid nature re-

sulting from the interactive dynamics that envelop them with other orders of narrative and reasoning. In truth, the three fields we attempt to characterise herein are not analytically viewed as structures, but rather as spheres linked to worlds and cosmovisions of education which are constantly shrinking and/or expanding.

Albeit provisionally, and having the analytical status of ideal types, one can accept that the regimes of enunciation coming from the sphere of politics is occupied with stabilising the criteria governing the definition of justice and with the search for instruments that allow the educational field to be structured, adjusting it to these criteria. The argumentative logic that predominates in this sphere is one of persuasive and normative argument, whereby this persuasion is at the origin of curved discursive productions and is marked by redundancy. This regime of enunciation guarantees, on the one hand, a simplified analysis of education, attributing qualities to the educational entities and their relations that enable them to be represented as manageable. It is based on these concerns that the figure of the technician and the expert is drawn up, who is simultaneously a producer of specific knowledge and a translator of knowledge coming from other spheres.

The sphere of educational utopia and militancy, which, as we know, played a major symbolic role in the political circles at the end of the 1990s in Portugal, led to a regime of enunciation related to the expression of convictions, where an argumentative mindset predominated which often made use of figures coming from the authenticity, i.e. of the civic and ethically authentic discourse. In this regime of enunciation the use of exemplar role models played a central role. In effect, in the second half of the 1990s, the field of political definition of education in Portugal sought to reference itself regularly on the structuring principles of New Education movement (autonomy, active pedagogy, attention to pupils' needs, project, etc), at the same time as it made systematic use of the role model figure and practical examples as a management device for educational change (the most obvious case is the attempt to disseminate the good practices produced in the educational field).

In the cognitive sphere, in turn, precedence was given to regimes of enunciation structured by

concerns related to the adjustment between the discourse produced and the reality. In seeking to be congruent with the reality, the cognitive sphere often fell back on arguments of an explicatory or interpretative nature. Both search for coherence and, to disseminate it, these arguments attempt to develop a clarification reasoning, which distinguishes them from those in the political discourse that, as we stressed, are marked by redundancy.

While the complexity of education tends to be simplified by the political field, placing emphasis above all on the qualities of the beings that allow them to be represented as manageable, and while this complexity is simplified in the utopian discourse by using examples and the possibility of disseminating such examples in the educational field, provided that the field is structured by a logic of conviction, the simplification carried out in the cognitive field complies with criteria that, on the one hand, allow the acknowledgement of the entities and their relations in the methodological device adopted, and on the other hand allow to represent them in the systems of widespread dissemination of the knowledge produced, both in the training devices and in participation in congresses, in the production of articles in journals, and also in the production of opinion articles backed up by scientific instruments. One should point out that despite the negative connotation that has been attributed to this regime of enunciation, associating it to *eduquês* (education babblespeak), the narratives produced in the cognitive sphere are deeply influenced by concerns for clarification (making the field clear) and acceptance by the different sections of public inserted in specific dissemination devices.

Therefore, the presupposition in this analysis is that the educational scientificity, its epistemological models, the institutional forms of the way the research is organised, as well as the devices of production and dissemination of knowledge, in other words the socio-technical networks that ensure different forms of transporting the research to the social destinations, becomes intelligible taking into account the forms through which it produces its autonomy and its articulations with these spheres, which are not necessarily congruent amongst them.

Educational scientificity is structured, therefore, in a heterogeneous space and is subject to a set of

contradictory requests and ties that, given that they are not congruent among one another, allow provisional and contextualised articulations. Its way of existence is hence marked by an instability whose management is indispensable for the structuring of a hetero-determined autonomy.

FROM CRITICAL SCIENCE TO SCIENTIFIC NORMATIVISM

Based on the analytical model briefly described above, one can accept that, throughout its history, educational scientificity has been structured in a complex form, managing and seeking coherence, even if provisional and unstable, between a set of regimes of enunciation and injunctions and relatively contradictory forms of translation. In truth, as we have highlighted, the regimes of enunciation are built upon modes of education definition organised around a set of social and implicitly cognitive conventions, structured to a greater or lesser extent, which play an important role in the internal socialisation and legitimisation of the power relations. Despite confirming themselves as the structural building blocks of the different spheres, these conventions owe their notoriety to their ability to co-exist with conventions coming from other spheres, insofar as they enable translation and incorporation of cognitive productions organised around conventions that are relatively extrinsic to them.

In this context, educational scientificity and its autonomy is hetero-determined, marked by an unsurpassable instability, whose management supposes a permeability to socio-cognitive dynamics that tend to pulverise the field in different directions.

In the past fifteen years this unstable existence of the educational scientificity was substantially simplified and restricted to two relatively distinct periods.

In a first moment one witnessed the reinforcement of educational research subordination to the political sphere and a tendency to tone down the research specificity, resulting from its excessive dependence on the fields of assessment and legitimacy of the political decision makers. The discourses that intended to be cognitively adapted to the reality were therefore left to play second fiddle to the discourses concerned with the management of justice and the management of modes of existence of the beings in

the educational field. In this context we witnessed a dilution of the critical stance of the research, resulting both from the increased importance of instructions coming from the political field, and from the establishment of closer relations between the sphere of utopia and the sphere of politics.

This trend to gradually transform the research field into a kind of technical assistance field for the political power occurred through the reinforcement of a pragmatist model and a pragmatic model of verification. Forty years ago, Jürgen Habermas, in the book *Technology and Science as "Ideology"*, predicted this situation in the following terms: "the public to whom research is directed and to whom scientific information is directed, is no longer, or at least is not immediately, a public opinion that carries out the discussion, but rather a client who is interested in the research process because of its technical application" (1968, pp. 123-124)

In the set of scientific text formats valued in this context come into sight a certain narrative style and a style of text that is embodied in the research reports centred on technical recommendations. This text coexists with another kind of text, geared towards a broader segment of the public, embodied in books produced by academic publishers, comprising a theoretical part and a practical part and which suggest that the only way educational research can exist is defined by its technical application, whether this application is geared by education professionals or by policy decision experts.

In a second moment this *direct* relationship between research and the political sphere seems to have been diluted significantly, albeit without being able to surmise from that an absence of political influence in the research. In effect, even if this influence is not direct, nevertheless it is exercised through the formulation of research policies that set the framework of both the legitimate methods of carrying out research and the legitimate methods of presenting the research products. Indeed, to paraphrase Habermas (1968, p. 124), we are witnessing the valuing "of internal public opinion about science in which the experts exchange information among one another through journals or congresses". This closure of the research field on itself, linked to the tendency of its structure to be heavily conditioned by the financing policies and assessment from outside the field,

imposes, in a greater or lesser extent, an explicit pure or purified epistemological discourse linked to a tendency to reinforce a style of scientific text which insinuates a model of scientific production that would involve a prior review of the literature, followed by the description of the methodological procedures, that lay the basis for the undertaking of the empirical work, followed by the conclusions. As well as the positivist connotations that underpin this model, it insinuates a method of practising research taken from an industrial model where planning and a certain rationalisation of the procedures would play a central role. Furthermore, it's nurtured the illusion that respect for these formal rules would preserve the field from its contamination through extrinsic instructions, namely those coming from the militant and politics fields, i.e. it prevents the recognition that the closing in of the field on itself compromises the research field by imposing research that results in valuable products in a market constructed exclusively inside the scientific community as the single model to achieve social value.

Transformed into a commodity that seeks its value through its circulation in the hierarchical circles of the scientific journals and whose reputation depends, partly, on its ability to impose scientific writing styles (homogenous and closer to a greater or lesser extent with the positivist models of thinking and practising science), research, as André Gorz highlights (2003, p. 85), contributes to the “destruction of meaning, to the deterioration of the social relations (...) producing negative externalities”, namely the reinforcement of its own Taylorisation and hyper-specialisation. In this context, the profession of the researcher tends to become an incapacitating profession, a profession where “the great majority are acquainted with more and more things, but know and understand less and less (...) given that the fragments of specialised knowledge are apprehended by experts who ignore the context and the device that produced them, like they ignore its potential to underpin the dynamics of production of meaning” (Gorz, 2003, p. 111).

To conclude, one should stress that this research model tries to impose itself as the only legitimate research model for the training of young researchers, namely undertaking PhDs where students have naturally interiorised the assumption that the process

of producing a long text at the same time as it can be replaced by a set of short texts (journal articles), necessarily demands the simultaneous production of articles, papers, etc. As such, a cumulative conception of research has become natural, as well as the presupposition that the skills needed for the production of this long text are directly related to the skills needed for the production of short texts, sticking to a given narrative texture. On the other hand, this thinking tends to undermine the legitimacy of the higher education institutions intervention of young scientists in their training about the products and processes of research. The proximal training regulation loses ground to a decontextualised training which is structured through globalised criteria coming from distant management spheres, whose social utility is disconnected from the contexts and the pertinence of the problems research deals with.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO A RE-SCIENTIZATION OF THE EDUCATION FIELD

In an interview given in 1976, Michel Foucault (2001, p. 158) drew attention to the existence of a strong determination between the models of society and the regimes of truth in the following terms: “each society has its regime of truth, its general policy of truth, in other words, the kind of discourses that it accepts and deems as truthful, the mechanisms and bodies that allow the distinction between true propositions and false propositions, the way they are sanctioned, as well as the techniques and procedures that are valued as regards obtaining the truth”. In this same interview he also emphasises that the current regimes of truth tend to be restricted to the scientific regimes which, therefore, are objects of an intense dissemination and consumption, ensured in part by the large-scale political and economic apparatus.

Foucault's opinion is especially relevant if we think of an educational scientificity that even if is not aiming to impose an alternative regime of truth should be aware to the creation of conditions that allow an arguments debate among the various regimes of truth. This concern enables us to structure the search for alternative models taking into account

their modes of institutional, cognitive and political existence.

1. From the institutional point of view the emphasis attributed to a scientificity occupied with the qualification of an argued debate in the educational field implies that one recognises strong autonomy in the research field, without this autonomy being viewed as independence, but rather as a diversification of its dependencies. The autonomy of the scientific community does not imply the field closure on itself but rather a reworking of its dependencies, both as what regards the militant sphere and the political sphere, as well as what regards the widened sphere of the dissemination of knowledge. This results in the need to think out multi-polar regulation of the field that enables the dilution of its excessive dependence on the funding institutions and on the valued models of production and relationship with knowledge, so that qualified citizen relations with products and processes of educational research can be established.

To sum up, it is important to deepen models of regulation that enable the coordination of the heterogeneous injunctions resulting both from the instrumental, cognitive and utopian rationalities.

The development of a citizen research does not only have implications in the definition of the interfaces that the field maintains with other domains of social life. This citizen research has a structural influence on the field itself by appealing for research agendas to focus more on problems and issues that may destabilise the borders established by the specialised areas of education sciences. Without denying the pertinence of the disciplinary and disciplined specialisation, it is important to drive its development through the deepening of trends of unspecialised specialisation that promotes dialectic relations between the specialisations established and between science as a general specialisation and what has been referred to as common sense knowledge.

2. From the cognitive point of view it is important to recognise that the regimes of truth always involve regimes of ignorance and produce a hierarchy of the different segments of knowledge in the field. In accepting that the modes of production of truth and ignorance are not independent from the social

importance attributed to the different subjects and socio-educational dynamics, the citizen research can play an important role in lending visibility to the modes of existence ignored by the political definition of education and to the processes of construction of new educational subjects which, in general, emerge on the edges of the system. If the attribution of a centrality to the peripheries is backed up by a set of ethical reference points that were always present in the educational scientificity, the truth is that it implies an epistemologically grounded cognitive work. Pierre Bourdieu (1989) warned us about the importance of a cognitive work that allows the critique of the way the problems and their pertinence are presented, viewing this task as a condition of autonomisation of a scientific community that does not want to be the object of the objects that takes as objects. Therefore, the educational scientificity is not only a process of knowledge or recognition of phenomena that are produced in the field, but is decisively inscribed in the very process of production of the field, in a dynamic where the cognitive and epistemological determinants of the science are articulated with the social uses that are given to that science.

3. From the point of view of scientific policies, it is important to acknowledge that if education is located not in the kingdom of things but in the human city, which is structured through argumentation, the research models to endeavour are positioned in a long time-scale. Mostly derived from the specific characteristics of education, these models only appear to be compatible upon the definition of long-term research policies, whereby these policies are instituted more as regulatory reference points of the research rather than as a set of targets to meet, to a greater or lesser extent structured.

The challenge that is put to educational research in this context concerns the management of the tense relations that are established between the short time periods of profiting from the value of the exchange of the research products in the marketplace of scientific productions and the long time periods that mark research in the domain of education sciences and the very modes of existence of the educational subjects. It must be stressed here that the current models of science assessment and the rationality associated to them aiming at the production or delimitation of the

research agendas in the short or, at most, medium term, at the same time as they are compatible with the trends towards the marketability of the research products (in the current mode of market functioning, the instantaneous is under-valued), only appear to be compatibles with a science model viewed as an application of a set of coded techniques geared towards the administration of a test coming, to a large degree, from the laboratorial world.

It should be acknowledged that the current trends of structuring the research field resulting both from criteria of research assessment, and the effect of these criteria on the collective sub-conscience of the researchers, comprise an obstacle to the development of a citizen science. In truth, the subordination of the logic behind the structuring of the field to the logic of its funding and the dependence which has come about to an uncontrolled productivism leads to trends and processes of naturalisation towards the reproduction of models, with profound implications on the researchers' socialisation processes. This subordination indeed calls for the coded and routine transmission of a set of research techniques and models and styles of scientific writing that emphasise above all researchers' training models based on the image of the science done, which excludes "the everyday experience of the research work that constitutes the very reality of the research, in other words, the reality of the science that has to be done" (Latour, 1995, p. 11). One can say that the training and socialisation for research have become obstacles in themselves to the undertaking of the research.

CONCLUSION

The transformations in the educational research field cannot be analytically viewed either as productions or regressions, but are rather unmistakable forms of managing the systems of dependence that structure the research and make it possible. In this background it has been possible to identify two logics of thought in recent years that result in part from a strong predominance of instructions coming from outside the field which has led to a certain dilution of the importance of the field of

pedagogical militancy in detriment to the increased importance of the sphere of politics. This dilution has been expressed in two different ways. In an initial instant the reinforcement and subordination of the research to politics was direct. This had severe implications in the ability of the research field to manage its hetero-determined autonomy with the consequent dilution of the critical facets of the research and the reinforcement of mindsets where cognitive legitimacy was mixed in with political legitimacy, meaning that the sphere was heavily structured by an instrumental reasoning directed at the macro-political decision-making field. In a second instant the influence of the politics field on the research field resulted in the formulation of research policies apparently legitimised by the search for a self-determined autonomy in the field where the strong relationship between assessment and funding led to a homogenisation and uniformity of the research procedures and of the methods of disseminating its products to an audience that was restricted to a supposed scientific community. In both cases one witnessed a decontextualisation of the norms, procedures and dissemination of the research products that, as we have attempted to show, had important repercussions on the socialisation of the researchers. The socialisation process tended to be structured around a rationality that symbolically arose in line with the logic of science done in detriment to a logic of science to be done. In this background there's a tendency to the naturalisation of cumulative visions of science, essentialist visions of the scientific field, as well as the predominance, also cumulative, of monochromatic logics of scientific writing.

The challenges that arise in this background as regards the recreation of an educational scientificity which intends to be socially pertinent, a promoter of argumentative debate in the educating city and multi-paradigmatic, can be structured around a mindset of bringing the founding challenges of educational scientificity up to date. We refer namely to the challenges that result from constructing an autonomous stance that is able to draw advantages from the instabilities that, within the framework of normal science, are deemed as epistemological shortfalls. Among these instabilities the following should be highlighted:

- 1) Those that result from the acknowledgement that in this domain it is not possible to definitively establish, using any technical procedure, a stable distinction between facts and opinions, which implies the recognition that research in education is “condemned” to insert itself and manage its insertion in various narrative orders;
- 2) Those that result from the impossibility of establishing stable borders between the theoretical and empirical objects of the different domains of the disciplines integrated into the education sciences, which draws attention to the centrality of a set of challenges resulting from the emphasis that should be attributed to the problems rather than to a disciplined knowledge;
- 3) Those that result from the conjugation of what was referred to above, where one must attribute added importance to borders — borders between disciplines and borders between scientificity and what has come to be referred to as common sense — which places education sciences at an apparent paradox: the centrality of its social and epistemological relevance is to a large extent dependent on the research carrying out coherent work on the peripheries;
- 4) Those that result from the need to carry out work which, accepting the sense of risk that underpins the education sciences and the social and human sciences in general, is simultaneously a structured work that is guided by the concerns for rigour, not to be confused with the technical rigidity of the procedures. The management of this instability especially draws attention to the need for the knowledge production and dissemination processes to develop original forms of making scientific rigour compatible with permeability of other ways of thinking, and the need to make the dissemination of the products among a scientific community compatible with their democratic insertion in the public debate sphere, so as to rejuvenate the educational reflection itself.

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