

Presentation note

Education and Health

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This university has a strong tradition of enrolling health professionals on degree and post-graduate education sciences courses. It was here that, in a pioneering attitude, the first masters' courses in health pedagogy began in the early 1990s, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and aimed at a wide range of professionals, albeit all belonging to the same field: nurses, nursing teachers, doctors, diagnosis and therapy technicians, psychologist, managers. This continuing tradition has proven to be extremely enriching for the education sciences (initially almost exclusively geared towards school), both with regard to the pedagogical and the scientific facets. This edition of the *Sísifo* journal is made up of and intends to disseminate part of the most recent research produced at post-graduate level. It is a set of contributions that stand out, both because of their methodological and thematic diversity, and because they help to highlight the ties that bring the action and research domains closer to education and health.

The scientific and technical advances made to reduce early mortality, prolong life expectancy and eradicate many of the illnesses that decimated humanity in the past, has conferred great material, social and symbolic importance to the health field. As a consequence, we have witnessed an exponential rise in the supply of healthcare services, and also exponential growth in the respective costs, as well as the emergence of an increasingly numerous and wide-ranging group of professionals in this area. The scientific progress made in this

domain, namely in so-called “developed” countries, has reinforced a tendency, which dates back to the 19th century, that has given rise to a new attitude towards death which, taken to the extreme, involves denying it or hiding it. This phenomenon has obvious civilisational repercussions, in line with the astute observation made by Norberto Elias (2001), whereby one loses the connection between the way to live and the way to die. In a broad sense, the construction of this connection (in the final analysis it is death that lends meaning to life), at the individual and collective level is at the heart of the learning process which coincides with the vital cycle. The health field and its problems therefore transverse an educational dimension whose visibility is affected by the hegemony of a medical paradigm, dominated by a technical and instrumental conception of scientific knowledge.

The perverse effects, translated into counter-productive phenomena, which Ivan Illich so lucidly analysed almost forty years ago (1977), are today dramatically proven and accentuated by what the same Illich (1999), in one of his last texts, would call the “obsession for perfect health”, in which “every individual demands that progress bring an end to the suffering of the body, maintaining the freshness of youth and prolonging life to infinity” which entails, in the opinion of this author, the very denial of the human condition. The iatrogenic effects deriving from medicine geared exclusively towards curing are today clearly accentuated by the transformation of healthcare into a good that fuels the

pharmaceutical and hospital industries, aimed at obtaining profit. The considerable growth, all around the world, in the number of caesarean births, for example, is partially explained by the transformation of this surgical intervention into a consumer good.

On the other hand, if scientific medicine affirms itself by taking as its central benchmark the “illness”, we are witnessing an inversion in the direction of the discourses that today place the emphasis on the centrality of “health”. Each person now not only has the right, but above all the *duty* to remain healthy, adopting “correct” behaviours and lifestyles. Paradoxically, the obsession with perfect health leads to the multiplying of chronic diseases that consist of preventing everything that is defined as pathological.

In our societies, given the evolution briefly outlined above, research in the health field has become more complex and has paved the way for new problems for the social and human sciences, in which we include the hybrid domain of education sciences which tends to intertwine, with growing pertinence, with the equally hybrid field of health sciences. It is the fertility of this subject matter, constituting the core of this edition of the *Sísifo*, journal, which we seek to bring to the fore, multiplying and diversifying the points of view and approaches in relation to the empirical reality.

A predominant theme in the set of articles deals with issues involved in training of health professionals in the workplace, resulting from studies focusing on initial training, both of nurses and doctors. These are the case, respectively, of the articles written by Miguel Serra (who is currently completing his PhD on the construction of professional identity by nursing students) and Patrícia Rosado Pinto who, based on her PhD thesis, tackles the challenges today facing the training of doctors, as well as the role that can be played by an education department in a medical faculty. The rest of the articles, based on completed masters’ theses, deepen knowledge about the training potential of the workplace, focusing on a variety of facets. On the one hand, learning while exercising one’s profession in a hospital environment, as is the case with articles by Maria Emília Bártolo (case study of a paediatric intensive care unit) and Patrícia Vinheiras Alves

(who looks specifically into the training potential of multi-professional teams). On the other hand, the results of research into the relation between professional exercising and the community and family context are published: Alexandra Cosme describes a community project centred on diabetes, while Raquel Correia throws light on the logic underpinning the orientation towards the community of recently graduated nurses. The article by Ana Raquel Gonçalves delves into the interface relation between the hospital environment and the family context, focusing on the patient’s point of view (how one learns to be a mother). This theme is completed by two critical appraisals penned respectively by Luísa d’Espiney and Graça Simões. Both texts are about the publication of masters’ theses, whose research focuses on the training and construction of nurses’ identity.

This edition of *Sísifo* is further enriched by the important contribution of Brazilian colleagues: Lourdes Helena da Silva’s speech is published on the Brazilian experience in the use of alternation in education. On a similar topic, we publish the article by Maria José Soares which analyses the experience of teachers in the area of agrarian reform. Ramon de Oliveira brings us a summary of the influence of the business fabric and supranational agencies on the professional training policies in Brazil.

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