

A brief assessment of the intense activities of Education and Research

We have never been more obsessed with time than we are today. We know that contemporary life is increasingly marked by unbridled consumerism, by an overload of stimuli, by hurrying, by the lack of time, and by the feeling of urgency, as well as by competition, by the so-called productivity, by technological progress and by the excess of information. To carry on amidst so much pressure, we are forced to become experts in survival at high speeds. Within this context, we often forget that this frantic relationship with time, a defining characteristic of current society, is the result of a long historic and social process.

In the fast-paced times we live in, it is perhaps useful to remember the wise words of sociologist Norbert Elias which, although formulated at a different epoch, help us to have a critical view about some of the excesses present in contemporary society, and also about the very notion of time across the eras, a fundamental aspect of what he calls the civilizing process:

Time has therefore become the symbolic representation of a vast array of relations that brings together various sequences of an individual, social, or purely physical nature.

This all contributes, it would seem, to modify our conception of the relations between individual, society, and nature.^{1*}

Faced with so many calendars, diaries, and clocks that regulate our lives, time seems to be an inescapable exigency. Indeed, the time awareness we have today has been internalized to such extent that we have significant difficulty in imagining that human communities in other eras – or even of our own time – could be capable of surviving without the signposts of temporality to which we are accustomed.

Thus, whether we want it or not, our actions are oriented by the time limits. The year has barely started, and we already have that feeling that we have worked a lot, and that time has flown by. This may be due to that fact that, for us Editors of Education and Research, 2011 began in quite a hectic fashion.

1- * ELIAS, N. Sobre o tempo. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor, 1998, p. 17. Our translation.

Right at the start of the year, we managed to implement some changes that were being planned for a good deal of time. So, despite the difficulties inherent to the coordination of an academic journal with the characteristics of our periodical (difficulties related, above all, to the excessive volume of work, to the difficult management of insufficient financial and human resources, to the pressure of tight deadlines, to the adverse consequences that a journal like ours suffers from the perverse policies adopted elsewhere to accelerate academic production etc), we managed, with the invaluable help of our editorial staff and from the Dean of the School of Education of the University of São Paulo, to win important battles concerning the journal's daily life, survival, and directions. Thus, despite being only a few months into the year, we already have much to celebrate.

First, we launched in the first volume of 2011 a theme issue in response to a call for papers (which we denominated Directed Call) on a specific topic that we deemed of high interest to all the education academic community at the present time: the process of implementing the nine-year fundamental education in Brazil. The huge response we had from renowned authors (affiliated to a variety of Brazilian research institutions), who submitted their works, as well as the strong interest demonstrated by our readers, made clear the timeliness of the subject choice. The repercussion of the texts was such that we eventually organized in May this year a panel on the theme, which took place in the School of Education auditorium, with the presence of some of the authors whose texts comprised the issue. Bringing forth this theme issue was very important, insofar as it resulted from the current editorial policy, which seeks to balance the publication of original texts spontaneously submitted by researchers from various universities with the issue of texts accepted in response to directed calls (which are, of course, still rigorously reviewed by our referees), texts that are selected by the editorial committee, and that are intended to reflect emergent or pressing topics within the national educational debate, responding to the concerns of the wider scientific community.

A second and important achievement relates to the fact that in February we completed one year using the SciELO Publication System as a tool to communicate with the authors and referees of Education and Research. As the reader probably knows, SciELO (an acronym for Scientific Electronic Library Online) comprises a collection of nearly 250 Brazilian journals, freely available over the Internet. An indication of its relevance is its recent classification in first place in a worldwide ranking of open access gateways prepared by the Cybermetrics laboratory affiliated to the Spanish National Research Council. In addition to working as an important virtual portal, SciELO offers an electronic system that speeds up the whole process of submitting and reviewing the articles. With the efficient coordination of Wilson Gambeta, Education and Research editorial manager, and relying on the invaluable support of an eclectic team of nearly one thousand ad hoc reviewers, we managed, within

one year, to reduce significantly the average lead time for an article (from its submission to the final answer to the authors). During this first year of using SciELO, authors waited an average of 153 days (roughly five months) for an answer from the Editorial Committee, which represents nearly halving the average time between submission and final communication to the author, which before the use of the electronic system was 294 days (approximately 9.7 months). We expect that this lead time will be further reduced to close to four months during the second year, thanks to the constant improvement of our records, and to the greater familiarity of the editors with the system.

Besides the extremely promising results of our entering the SciELO system, we also celebrate the fact that we have once again linked the journal to the School's Library, and we have rearranged and expanded the staff and physical space of the journal. To meet the growing demand for works, the editorial staff has also grown. We can now count on the additional help of two members of the School's academic staff: Julio Groppa Aquino and Vinicio de Macedo Santos.

For all these reasons, we start the year certain of having better conditions to develop the noble task, of great responsibility, that we have as members of the Editorial Committee of one of the most prestigious academic periodicals of the area of education in Brazil. Finally, there is one last motive for celebration. Education and Research has endeavored to publish texts by classic and contemporary foreign authors, in an attempt to widen and enrich the educational debate in Brazil. In the present issue, we are honored to bring to the Brazilian public the remarkable, courageous and timely text by Mexican scholar Emilia Ferreiro (originally published by Fundación Germán Sánchez Ruipérez from Salamanca, Spain) entitled "Alfabetización digital - de que estamos hablando?" [Digital literacy - what are we talking about?]. In this essay, Ferreiro makes a perceptive survey of the complex relations between technology and education, focusing more specifically on the school institutions and on the current generation of pupils who have been born after the establishment of technology in society (whom she calls informatized children).

Apart from this text, the present issue brings, as we shall describe below, a great variety of themes and theoretical approaches, revealing the multiplicity of questions that emerge when education is subjected to reflection. The reader will, then, find articles discussing problems which are, from a political perspective, of a more structural character, such as the commercialization of higher education, and others that deal with different aspects of teacher education. There are texts on the use of video recordings in qualitative researcher, on teaching and learning in a virtual environment, on graduate studies in Physical Education, on school mentoring, on curriculum, on the professional competences, and, finally, on the work of non-governmental organizations in reading activities.

The opening article of this issue, entitled “The quasi-markets in higher education: from the improbable perfectly competitive markets to the unavoidable State regulation”, by Julio Cesar Godoy Bertolin, discusses the commercialization of higher education, associating it to the reforms that took place at this level of teaching during the last decades. These reforms strengthened the presence of private institutions of education, and favored the emergence of the logic and mechanisms of the market within the educational sphere, causing education to lose its status as a public good, and making it assume the condition of a commercial service. The author analyzes what he terms competition imperfections, and concludes that state regulation continues to be indispensable to the existence of perfectly competitive markets within higher education, which renders the idea of self-regulating mechanisms highly implausible.

The next article, by Andrea Garcez, Rosalia Duarte and Zena Eisenberg, “Production and analysis of video recordings in qualitative research”, deals with an important methodological question, about which there is little reference material. The authors discuss the ethical and technical aspects of the research using video recording, as well as forms of cataloging, organizing, and analyzing the empirical material collected. Based on current and representative bibliography, the work constitutes an important contribution to the development of qualitative research carried out through the registering of sound and moving images.

Vânia Maria Nunes dos Santos and Pedro Roberto Jacobi are the authors of the third text presented here, whose title is “Teacher education and citizenship: school projects in environmental studies”. The article discusses in a novel way the process of teacher education, introducing news research instruments, such as georeferencing, socio-environmental indicators, and the approach to hydrographic basics. It associates teaching, self-evaluation, research, construction of local knowledge, and the offering of answers to the problems of the community. According to the authors, incorporating the socio-environmental question into the pedagogical practice allows the projects to insert school in its surroundings, contributing to form critical and participative citizens in collective actions that include the school, with the purpose of develop more democratic public policies.

Next comes the article entitled “Environmental education and education policies: a study in public schools of Teresópolis (RJ)”, by Rodrigo de Azevedo Cruz Lamosa and Carlos Frederico Bernardo Loureiro. It is a reflection about the insertion of environmental education as an object of study in public schools, centering on the municipal school network of Teresópolis, Rio de Janeiro. The data used by the authors come from an empirical study conducted in schools, and also from the analysis of the PNEA (National Plan of Environmental Education) and of official documents of the municipal school network of that town. Based on recent and consistent

bibliography, Lamosa and Loureiro carried out their research and, whilst recognizing that the initiatives by teachers and pupils materialize relevant practices, conclude that fundamental issues such as curriculum guidelines, layout and contents, reorganization of teacher working hours, and teachers' initial and continued education "still need to be addressed by the public policies in order to promote the effective rooting of environmental education in the school context". Through the quality of the reflection conducted by the authors, this article opens up an exciting field of debate, dialoguing also with the text that precedes it.

The article by Sérgio Pereira da Silva, entitled "Aesthetics and ethics in Kierkegaard: inferences for the pedagogical culture of Southeast Goiás", reflects upon the pedagogical culture of that area of the Brazilian state, highlighting the pedagogical impasses observed during their teaching and teacher education experiences, still marked by an aestheticizing character often regarded as overcome. It uses as its theoretical framework Kierkegaard's reflection on ethics and aesthetics, and also studies about the Brazilian culture conducted by Mario Vieira Mello and Regis de Moraes. At the end of this theoretical and empirical research the author concludes that, between the being and the seeming, there continues to be a long distance in what concerns the practices of teaching, teacher education and the attitudes of the pupils themselves. The "immediate and contingent character of aestheticism, in contrast to the processual (in the sense of intentionality) character of ethics", is present, according to the author, in the most diverse actions and reflections that constitute the educational ethos of Southeast Goiás, stifling originality and the sense of autonomy or excellence, and undermining the efforts for rigor, justice and for "our dearest values".

"Teaching and learning in the virtual environment: shifting paradigms" by Gilberto Lacerda dos Santos reports on the results of a study developed by the author between 2004 and 2008 about thirteen academic and professionalizing Master dissertations, and the purpose was to discuss the virtual classroom and to redefine what is understood by an educative space. According to the author, the contribution brought by this kind of research rests on the "affirmation, reaffirmation, or confirmation of a set of defining elements of the virtual classroom, which can turn it into the scenario for a didactic experience that is unique, pleasant, effective, efficacious, and totally consistent with the dynamics of the information society". These elements would be the "concepts of network learning community, of collaborative virtual work, of the horizontalization of the educative relation, of dynamic didactic materials, and of a pedagogical mediation based on interactivity". The adoption of such concepts would lead to a new dynamics for the virtual relations removed from the current traditional practices, which are ineffective even in the traditional education.

The next article, entitled “Reading in non-governmental organizations and interrelations with the public school” by Ana Shitara Inglesi and Idméa Semeghini-Siqueira, deals with a recurrent theme in educational literature: reading and literacy. Its originality resides in introducing a new element in the analysis, namely, the action of non-governmental organizations in the teaching of languages. The research, of ethnographic characteristics, was developed within an organization that worked in São Bernardo do Campo, State of São Paulo, and lasted for one and a half years. The theoretical references are Frank Smith, a theoretician of psycholinguistics, and Hans Robert Jauss, a theoretician of reception. The authors concluded that the NGO studied contributes to improve the literacy process, but, at the same time, operates in an excluding fashion, by selecting to take part in the activities it promotes in public schools only those pupils already interested in reading, which does not contribute to form new readers. By the end of the research they assert that, those criticisms notwithstanding, there is much of positive in the interaction between public education and those institutions, insofar as they promote alternative experiences for the schools, establishing a relationship of exchange of experiences that may improve teaching as a whole.

Francisco Simões and Madalena Alarcão, both from the University of Coimbra, Portugal, discuss in their article “The effectiveness of school mentoring in promoting the socioemotional and instrumental development of youngsters”, a subject little debated in our country. The authors conduct a careful bibliographical survey of the concept of mentoring (tutoring, in Brazil), analyzing its functions, the study methodologies of different programs, its efficacy and results at the socioemotional and academic levels of the youngsters. They also discuss the general limitations of the efficacy studies and their implications for the investigation. Although this article does not refer to distance education programs, the field in which the question of tutoring is a theme of researches and debates in Brazil, it brings contributions which are also relevant to the questions related to them.

The article entitled “Professional competences and interdisciplinarity in Law: perceptions from students of a private college in Minas Gerais” by Kely César Martins de Paiva, Fernando Procópio Lage, Sthefania Navarro dos Santos and Carla Ribeiro Volpini Silva describes and analyzes the results of a study about the contributions of higher education in Law, and more specifically of interdisciplinary pedagogical practices in the formation and development of professional competences in the students of a private higher education institution. The analysis develops from the perceptions of the students themselves, and is based on the competence model of Afonso Fleury and Maria Tereza Leme Fleury, as well as on the competences prescribed in the national curriculum guidelines.

The authors of the article “The curriculum of the Technical Course in Agriculture: subverting the concept of curriculum matrix”, Flávia Moreira Barroca de Barros, Ana Louise de Carvalho Fiúza, Maria de Lourdes Mattos Barreto and José Ambrósio Ferreira Neto, analyze the factors that influenced the definition of the curriculum for the Technical Course in Agriculture at the Center for Agricultural and Forest Teaching and Development throughout its existence. Relying on documental analysis and interviews with teachers from the course, they identify their conceptions about the process of changing the curriculum. The article presents a discussion on the different aspects comprising the field of curriculum theory, relating them with the field of professional formation with the sphere of the agricultural sciences. In this sense, it offers an advance in terms of an interdisciplinary conception of curriculum and of professional formation.

The article by Edison de Jesus Manoel and Yara Maria de Carvalho, entitled “Graduate studies in Brazilian Physical Education: the (fatal) attraction to biodynamics”, shows how biodynamics, one of the subareas of graduate studies in Physical Education, alongside sociocultural and pedagogical studies, predominates and eventually becomes hegemonic in terms of research and the size of academic staff. This situation reflects a general trend in which researches oriented towards the sciences of nature are given priority over the studies developed along the sociocultural or pedagogical perspectives. According to the authors, this nationwide scenario is similar to the one observed in the USA, where academics from these latter subareas have faced growing difficulties to make their theoretical and methodological conceptions compatible with the modes of thinking and investigation of Kinesiology.

Carlos Miguel Ribeiro, from the University of Algarve, Portugal, is the author of the article “Approaching decimal numbers and their operations: the importance of an effective navigation between representations”. He focuses on some of the aspects and possibilities of activities related to the multiplication of decimal numbers that can be developed with pupils, “discussing the mathematics teaching knowledge underlying the preparation and conduction of these tasks”. The text draws upon a work developed along a few years with teachers from the first cycle of basic education (six- to nine-year-olds) in Portugal. The author emphasizes the importance of approaching the numbers concomitantly in the decimal and fractional forms, since it allows pupils to perceive the different representations of a same number. It is an article that offers several contributions to the field of mathematical education and for teacher education in this area.

Continuing with our policy of translating some of the texts to English, in addition to the Editorial, three articles from this issue are being offered in English in the electronic version of the journal at SciELO. These are: “The quasi-markets in higher education: from

the improbable perfectly competitive markets to the unavoidable State regulation”;
“Teacher education and citizenship: school projects in environmental studies”;
“Production and analysis of video recordings in qualitative research”.

We hope that the group of articles published here will offer to the reader different perspectives in the analysis of well-known problems and, perhaps, suggest new themes that will encourage original academic research. Above all, we wish that the reading of the texts may represent a pause for reflection, so needed to catch our breath and/or to bring some kind of hope that will ease the anguish that often comes with the frenetic rhythm of the postmodern no holds barred, and with the hard times in which we live.

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