

Foreword to the Thematic Section – Norbert Elias and Education

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“Sciences do not develop in the emptiness. [...]. In their causes and effect, the state of development of the human sciences, just like the natural sciences, is characteristic of a specific human action” (Elias, 1994b, p. 72). Assuming science as a result of human actions elaborated by research groups and individuals with specific interests, the two past decades have been drawing a heterogeneous and complex movement of elaboration in the modes of knowledge production, over all in the field of human and social sciences, with repercussion in the field of education. In this dynamic, an increasing number of researchers from various national and international institutions has extended the knowledge of the area, trying to understand the educational topics and having their inquiries supported on concepts and notions elaborated by the sociologist Norbert Elias.

The author has a life history and a fruitful work, marked by the social and historical events of his time, that is, the 20th century. Elias' biography informs us that he was born in Breslau (Germany), in June 22, 1897. The only son of wealthy Jews, Hermann Elias and Sophie Elias, he had an erudite education since his childhood. He studied Medicine, Philosophy and Psychology in Breslau, Freiburg and Heildeberg. He worked with Alfred Weber and was assistant of Karl Mannheim in Frankfurt. From Jewish tradition, with the ascension of the German national-socialism, he became a refugee in France and England in the

end of the 1930s. His father died in 1940 and, later, his mother was killed in Auschwitz by the Nazis (Elias, 2001).

His biography presents an author and a human being who spent all his life trying to understand the relations between individual and society, in all its complexity. Such life trajectory marks the late entrance of Elias in the academic life, as only in 1954, with almost 60 years of age, he took office for the first time a chair of professor in the University of Leicester, England. Later, he worked as a visiting professor in universities in Germany, Holland and Ghana. He received the Theodor W. Adorno award in Frankfurt in 1977 for his contribution to Sociology and the set of his work. He returned to Germany in 1979, when he worked as professor in the University of Bielefeld. He died in Amsterdam in 1990 (Veiga, 2005).

The late recognition and celebration of Elias' work, as well as his place in Sociology, made of him an outsider during all his life, a fact that prevented his work to be discussed in the context of his time, reaching visibility only in his last years of life, that is, in the old age. Among his major works, we mention *The Court Society* (1983), *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners* (1978) and *The Civilizing Process: State Formation and Civilization* (1982).

Only recently – in the last 20 years – Elias' major works began to be published in Portuguese, favoring the appropriation and the dissemination of his ideas in different areas of knowledge in Brazil. His theories became known in some under graduate courses and became a theoretical reference in theses, dissertations and scientific publications, addressing the most varied subjects, from the constitution, the place and the relation between the national States in the modern societies to the processes of violence in sports, and, more recently, in the field of education (Waizbort, 2001).

In this sense, we emphasize that the concepts and subjects addressed by Elias extrapolate the studies of Sociology, allowing us and, at the same time, demanding an interdisciplinary work. As pointed in his work, for Elias (2001), all social phenomena and processes involving people are susceptible to inquiry. Thus, such interdisciplinary approach places us before the challenge and the need to investigate the educational phenomena that involve the individuals and their groups in different contexts and dimensions of social life.

This perspective demands a counterpoint of his ideas with the paradigms of what is considered scientific, concerning to the methods of exact and natural sciences. On the subject, Elias (2005) repeatedly expressed the need of an investigative work, that is, to surpass polarities like those established between individual and society, past and present and/or the *cause and effect relation*, disseminated by Modern Sciences. Complementarily, he developed a sociology based on the conception that a society is formed by us and the others, as “[...] the one who studies and thinks the society is himself one of its members. [...] The society, which is often placed in opposition to the individual, is entirely formed

by individuals, being us, one being among the others” (Elias, 2005, p. 13).

In this context, Elias invites us to reflect and suggests a different theoretical-methodological reorientation in the field of social and human sciences, when discussing a reductionist theory of knowledge, that takes the subject in a void of *I* without *we*, *you* or *they*. Therefore, when adopting the figurational sociological perspective, elaborated by Norbert Elias, we are challenged to breach with the previous models and to transit from the *homo clausus* – “closed personality”, isolated from the society – to the image of *Homines aperti* – “open personality” – that constitutes with the others an interdependence network, a structure of people mutually guided and dependent between themselves (Kirschner, 1999).

The sociological perception of Elias inspires us to search in the assumptions of Figurational or processual Sociology different inquiries, such as the metaphor of a *network*, used by the author. The research tends to be constituted, therefore,

[...] beyond a link of individual threads; and, in the interior of the whole, each thread continues to form a unit in itself; it has a position and a singular form inside it [...]. It is this way that the individual effectively grows, from a network of people who existed before him to a network that he helps to form (Elias, 2001, p. 35).

This way, we constitute ourselves in a network of researchers who are forming and forming ourselves in partnership, for twenty years, questioning tensions and narratives of the formative-educational processes experienced in our recent societies. By means of this thematic section, we intend to contribute in the refinement of theoretical-methodological constructions that enrich and expand the investigative work in the field of education. Under such expectation, we gathered six papers articulated around the assumptions of Figurational Sociology, that express various possibilities of analyses of educational processes and, like Elias, try to answer to the phenomena here investigated.

In this direction, we open this thematic section with the paper *On Sexualisation and Eroticisation: emancipation of love and lust*, from Cas Wouters. Based mainly on the concepts of *power scale* and *informalization*, the reflections developed in the article lead to observe important shifts that happened in the romantic and sexual relations among the youth, considering the predominant social codes between men and women, parents and children, since 1880.

The researcher Cynthia Greive Veiga discusses in the article *Poor Children as an Outsider Group and their Schooling* the social-historical elaboration of poor children as an outsider group and the participation of schooling in this process, from the established outsiders figuration, an empirical paradigm developed by Norbert Elias, with the aim of questioning power relations. By means of documental research and historical inquiry, the author focuses the province/state of Minas Gerais in

the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, demonstrating the participation of the public School in the production of poor childhood as an inferior group.

In the paper *Memories of childhood and education: Eliasian approaches on women*, Magda Sarat and Miria Izabel Campos, based on Eliasian theses, especially on the study *The Changing Balance of Power Between the Sexes - A Process-Sociological Study: The Example of the Ancient Roman State* (1987) and on the oral history methodology, search in the childhood memories of women, children's teachers – born between 1950 and 1970 –, the formation and the education in the private and domestic spaces. They point out that the professional choice has close bonds with the female education, normatized by rules of control and civility for the women.

Having as source the state legislation, pedagogical printed matters, manuscripts from the school management, news from *Jornal de Piracicaba* and specialized bibliography, Tony Honorato systemizes reflections on the Reform of the São Paulo public teaching, directed by Sampaio Dória in 1920. As it is suggested in the paper's title – *The Sampaio Dória Reform: teachers, power and figurations* –, the concepts of figuration and power considered by Norbert Elias constitute the reference of analysis of the collected data, indicating that the 1920 Reform was a network of interdependent people and their unfoldings.

The researchers Reginaldo Célio Sobrinho, Maria das Graças Silva Carvalho de Sá and Edson Pantaleão, in *The Game of Warranties of Disabled People Social Rights*, develop on the *game model*, elaborated by Elias (2005), aiming to understand the *relative force* of the private institutions specialized in Special Education, in the actualization of the social rights of handicapped people. They indicate that the focus of these private specialized institutions in the context of the inclusive policies is founded on two interdependent *devices*: 1) the production and the dissemination of knowledge on the modes of intervention with people in situation of handicapping, in a medical-clinical perspective, and 2) the assistance face of economic and political liberalism that guided the consolidation of the Modern State.

We finish the thematic section with the paper *Elias' bodies: the conception of body and education from three works of Norbert Elias*, from Ricardo Lucena, who develops reflections on how to address the relation between body, education and civilization from Elias's perspective. The discussions undertaken evidence that body and education constitute a civilizatory nexus that departs from the childhood and reaches the old age, in a continuous form and that complement each other. The author alerts to the need of not dealing with the body as an isolated phenomenon, but as bodies that are constructed and complemented during the whole life of the individual(s) in society.

The present thematic section intends to bring to the educational field the Eliasian approach, aiming at the uncountable challenges that we are subject to face, considering other readings and shifts of focus in the field and the processes of knowledge construction. After all, in

Elias' terms (1994b, p. 114), as we become “[...] mutually dependent, as specialists of this or that type, in these networks of distinct functions, it became increasingly necessary to harmonize functions and activities”, so that we can analyze, investigate and understand the different directions that the inquiries in education are taking, in the distinct academic contexts.

We thank to the researchers who collaborated with the production of this thematic section, making possible the (reack)knowledge of the Eliasian elaborations and their contributions in the field of education, in distinct and fruitful directions.

We wish you all a great and fruitful reading!

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