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## RESEARCH AND TEACHING: TWO CONTEXTS IN FOCUS REPRESENTATIONS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** In this work, we aim to summarize two studies on social representations of elementary school students (8th and 9th years) from two educational institutions in the south of Santa Catarina: the college of a community university and a municipal public school. In both, the central question defined was: what are students' social representations about research? Information, in school documents and interviews with students, was subjected to content analysis (BARDIN, 2014), interpreted in light of Moscovici (2015), Jodelet (2001), Guareschi (2000) – corresponding to social representations; Beillerot (2001), Demo (1994, 2006, 2007), Oliveira and Campello (2016) – for school research, among others. The discourse expressed in the document's values knowledge produced in the context of students' everyday experiences (critical analysis). An intention that is worrying regarding its actual implementation, considering the students' speech. Due to the analysis and interpretation of the data, the social representations about research arising from them do not come close to the basic criteria required, according to the reference authors. In both schools, the hegemonic mistakes of school research appeared more emphasized, contradicting the founding representations that we defend regarding.

**Keywords:** School research, Social representations, Students, Comparing institutions.

## COLLECTION OF CONTEXTS CONSIDERED: JUSTIFYING

The purpose of this work is to revisit the studies carried out in the FORGESB territory<sup>1</sup> – confronting them – about the social representations of elementary school students (8th and 9th years) from two educational institutions in the south of Santa Catarina: the school of a community university and a municipal public school<sup>2</sup> (SILVEIRA e PEREIRA, 2018; NASCIMENTO e PEREIRA, 2022).

It is worth mentioning that, in both institutions, the central question defined for informed studies was: what are the social representations of elementary school students about research as an educational principle<sup>3</sup>? Data were collected through semi-structured interviews about their social representations regarding school research. Preliminary to this data collection procedure, however, the Pedagogical Political Project (PPP) of the CO; the Curricular Proposal of the Municipal Network of Criciúma (PCC) and the Curricular Guidelines for Elementary Education of the same network (DCEFC), to which the investigated public school (EP) belongs, were subjected to documentary analysis, seeking to identify how research, as a strategy teaching, is expressed in the indicated material. Information contained in documents and interviews with students was subjected to content analysis (BARDIN, 2014), interpreted in light of Moscovici (2015), Jodelet (2001), Guareschi (2000) – corresponding to social representations; Beillerot (2001), Demo (1994, 2006, 2007), Oliveira and Campello (2016) – for school research, among other authors.

Next, we summarize the data, interpretations and discussions arising from the documents

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1. Study and Research Group on Training and Management in Basic Education, in which the author of this work participates as leader.

2. The school will be identified by CO and the public school by EP, in order to protect their privacy.

3. Inserted in the teaching process as a methodological strategy, different, therefore, from scientific initiation research developed in a specific program, almost always, in the undergraduate context (Higher Education).

attached to the institutions considered in accordance with the research expressed as a didactic/methodological strategy. Analysis of students' social representations relating to research as an educational principle will also be summarized regarding type, teacher guidance, research results and contribution to the appropriation of knowledge. Such captures, in dialogue with the reference authors, will be compared based on the contexts studied, since despite the supposed organizational identification of both, what may exist, in reality, is a certain differentiation of didactic/methodological procedures, in particular, of research as an educational principle (focus of this work), considering the distinction between its instances (private and public) and consequences for pedagogical practice and student learning.

This is because, there is evidence that, in the public school to which children from lower classes primarily flock, the tendency to teach reproductive knowledge (prescriptive curriculum) has fertilized human formation that is submissive to the current sociocultural order.

In contrast, children from the privileged classes, who, in most cases, attend private schools, are trained, in a certain way, for independence, autonomy and internalization of the safeguard of the control of the instituted, which favors them in the perpetuation of the regulated /accepted, which benefit them (SILVA, 1992).

Bearing in mind that research, as a teaching strategy, has been misunderstood – more copying than authorship – the analysis that we will describe below also aims to achieve what we have just explained. Not without first making specific theoretical allusions about social representations and research.

## **SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS AND SCHOOL RESEARCH: THEORETICAL SUPPORT**

In this segment, social representations and research as an educational principle are central in the dialogue between theory and empirical data learned, subjected to analysis and interpretation.

### **SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS: WHAT CAN WE SAY ABOUT THEM**

In view of the objective related to the investigative process that we developed, we felt, firstly, the need to focus on the effort to understand the social representations of research and its importance in the area of education. That is, to inquire into how reference systems are formed and function, which we use to identify people and groups, as well as to interpret the events of everyday reality, in their relations with language, ideology, social imaginary, their role in guiding conduct and social practices.

Understood this way, social representations constitute essential elements for the analysis of mechanisms that significantly interfere in the educational process, as they allow us to name the different experiences and facts relevant to the reality experienced. After all, they are configured as “modes of knowledge that emerge and legitimize themselves in everyday interpersonal conversation and aim to understand and control social reality” (GUARESCHI, 2000, p. 35). From this angle, “the representations we have on a given subject are not directly linked to our way of thinking” (MOSCOVICI, 2000, p. 37), but imposed, in a normative way, according to the changes demanded over time (generations).

As systems of interpretation supported by relationships with the world and with others, they direct people's thoughts and behavior. They are, therefore, processes that intervene in the formation of established and/or instituting

human identities (JODELET, 2001).

Therefore, representations in different contexts (school is one of them) are established based on meanings derived from social relations, which develop in them. In other words, when there is sharing of accepted convictions, social representation is constituted, which can influence the social group in a critical way or not. This will depend on the existing conditionality, as each person involved can encourage the emergence of new practices, producing a new representation, distinct from the one considered hegemonic (SÁ, 1996; VERÍSSIMO, 2009).

Therefore, the consideration of organized systems of meanings, which constitute social representations, especially those of educators and students, is useful for understanding what happens in class in the practice of consequent social relations, both from the point of view of the objects of knowledge to be taught, as well as the psychosocial mechanisms at work in the educational process. Important, since the curriculum translates into the scenario of its configurations, meanings and discursivities; “it is therefore located at the intersection between representation – as a form of knowledge – and power” (SILVA, 2010, p. 33).

It therefore demands that we keep in mind that the school curriculum has historically focused on propagating “the partial and particular social and discursive constructions of the groups that are in a position to direct the process of representation” (SILVA, 2010, p. 33). It is therefore necessary to investigate its construction and conception based on the constitutive representations of its didactic-methodological practices, mainly school research – which interests us most here – asking: in whose service and in whose favor are curriculum and research? Very pertinent, obviously, because students from lower classes have been the target of this mistaken practice, which is not very convenient for guaranteeing

their full right to education (development and learning). So, let’s do some research in the classroom.

### **CLASSROOM RESEARCH: WHAT MATTERS MOST TO DEFEND**

We understand by research that which takes place in the school space, without, however, depreciating that practiced in different contexts as a way of finding an object, exploring new places, seeking new information or knowledge, considering that, in everyday life, we are faced with multiple situations that challenge us; deprecate reflection to investigate alternative solutions and decision making (BEILLEROT, 2001; RAMOS, 2002; DEMO, 2006).

The warning, however, comes from Beillerot (2001) who states that not every discovery can be designated as research; chance or intuition cannot be taken as such. According to him, work to be established as research admits at least three basic criteria: production of new knowledge, rigorous production of guidance and communication of results.

The production of knowledge must ensure that the research exercise favors an in-depth understanding of the object of study. According to Castoriadis (1999), the relevant knowledge regarding research is that which engages in the process of interrogation, questions the constituted meanings and casts doubt on hegemonic dogmatic meanings.

The second criterion alludes to the methodological process systematized in the “investigation of facts, phenomena and ideas” (BEILLEROT, 2001, p. 55), which will allow the researcher to dialogue and intervene competently in/with reality (DEMO, 1994). The criterion for communicating results, in turn, corresponds to socialization and discussion with the main participants/protagonists of the investigative process about the findings and inferred interpretations. This

way, from research, one can overcome the condition of being informed, reaching that of informant, through one's own interlocution (autonomy) and rejection of confining oneself to a simple object (DEMO, 2006, GRILLO, et al, 2006).

For Ninin (2008), however, although elementary and high school teachers, participants in the training courses they have taught, recognize the importance of research activity, their teaching actions do not prove to be effective in terms of the students' authorial and critical training. Their dependence and heteronomy tend to remain, justified by the fact that such activity ends up being restricted "to a text composed of fragments of other texts and/or information obtained through internet searches, almost always copied and little argued." by student-authors" (NIININ, 2008, p. 19).

It is also timely to highlight the study by Teixeira (2011, p. 6), who concluded: "most students understand research as a search for information, the way in which the teacher requests research does not always encourage students to take a critical stance, and that the texts produced by these students are usually copies". Due to this practice, warns Demo (2007, p. 8): "it is not possible to leave the condition of object (mass of maneuver), without forming a critical awareness of this situation and contesting it with one's own initiative, making this questioning the path to change".

The arguments presented are reinforced in published works on school research (1989-2011), analyzed by Oliveira and Campello (2016), by demonstrating the prevalence of copying and the absence of critical questioning. Copying enlivens reproductive and mechanical knowledge, disfavoring emancipation. It therefore emphasizes the student's condition of dependence on ready-made knowledge. It is also worth highlighting

that the works investigated also indicated the lack of motivation of students for research, lack and/or precarious guidance from teachers, among others.

The motto, in the dialogue with the referenced authors, then, is: own elaboration on historically produced knowledge, thought and worked critically, must not be limited to doing research, but learning to do it, through the mediation of the teacher in the condition advisor, theoretical study advice, data analysis and student elaborations/productions (CARDOSO and PEREIRA, 2010). It is therefore necessary for research to go beyond the simple category of task to be completed, mere delivery and/or evaluation/imputation of grades. Also overcome the hegemonic social representation in the school and social context to strengthen the traditional curriculum, denounced in the movement in defense of the critical and post-critical curriculum (SILVA, 2013).

It is worth repeating that the critical curriculum is based on the denunciation of sociocultural reproduction; the strengthening of capitalist social relations; the supposed neutrality regarding ideology and power; of disregarding the hidden curriculum, as a possibility of emancipation and liberation. The post-critical, in turn, designed under the vision of curriculum as a discursive practice of knowledge-power, meaning and representation, highlights otherness, difference, subjectivity, culture, gender and multiculturalism as essential and crucial elements of the human formative process.

Certainly, research taking place in the classroom as a whole, theoretically supported by the critical and post-critical curriculum, will have greater chances of governing new instituting social representations, supplanting the established and hegemonic ones, particularly those exposed and denounced here.



## **RESEARCH AND TEACHING: SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS IN BOTH CONTEXTS**

As announced, in this topic we summarize the analysis of the data that emerged from the documents and interviews carried out with students from the researched institutions, comparing the results.

According to the study by Silveira and Pereira (2018), the CO Pedagogical Political Project considers research to be a priority as a teaching principle consistent with the “process of appropriation and reconstruction of knowledge”. To this end, it values “the knowledge developed from the relationships that are established in the extracurricular environment” (PPP, 2016, p. 16), aiming to develop the student’s critical analysis through research. In this sense, the aforementioned study questioned whether the research evidenced in the PPP was still under the influence of Teaching by Problematization and Research (EPP), a collective proposal elaborated/implemented in the CO (2003 to 2013), given that such an initiative took the research as a basic procedure so that the student, as protagonist, “exercises his own elaboration, thought and critically worked on knowledge, historically produced” (p. 6); that not only did research, but above all, learned to research. It therefore emphasized the role of the teacher as a guide in theoretical study, analysis/interpretation of data and resulting student productions. It thus removed research from the status of a simple task to be completed, limited to the banal act of presentation and grade imputation by the teacher (SILVEIRA and PEREIRA, 2018).

As for EP, as it does not have access to the PPP, the study by Nascimento and Pereira (2022) decided to analyze the Curricular Proposal of the Municipal Network of Criciúma/SC and the Curricular Guidelines for Elementary Education of the same network to which it

belongs. In the first document, according to the authors, the research is confirmed by highlighting the need for students to access “scientific knowledge, through problematizing situations” to transform them “into thinking, critical, autonomous subjects, developing an understanding of the world to that there be the formation of opinions, discussions and arguments about real situations” (PCC, 2008, p. 16).

Of the guidelines, the mentioned study managed to capture the permanence of the purpose above corresponding to the competence, extracted from the Base Nacional Comum Curricular (2017) expressed as follows: “Exercise [...] investigation, reflection, critical analysis, imagination and creativity, to investigate causes, develop and test hypotheses, formulate and solve problems and create solutions [...] based on knowledge from different areas” (DCEFC, 2020, p. 11). In addition, the document refutes “the apprehension of ready-made knowledge”, in defense of the need for students to enter into “investigative action so that they can reveal – initially, with the help of the teacher and, later, by themselves – the conditions of origin and development of the concepts of the objects studied” (DCEFC, 2020, p. 18).

From the speeches shown, we can say that the documents analyzed revealed themselves, in a certain way, to be convergent regarding research as an educational principle, capable of producing in-depth and critical understandings, based on reconstructive questioning and its possibilities of subverting regulatory dogmatic truths (DEMO, 1994, 2007). The social representations of the participating students (voluntary adherence, through a Free Consent Form) attached to both contexts, consistent with their research experiences, however, distanced themselves, in a certain way, from the proclaimed purposes (SILVEIRA and PEREIRA, 2018;

NASCIMENTO and PEREIRA, 2022), keeping in mind the variations that we have identified – to be synthesized/analyzed, compared – regarding the type of research carried out, guidance from teachers, results/destination of the research and contribution in terms of learning. Let's continue then.

Regarding the type of research, the majority of students indicated the internet and the booklet adopted in the CO as a source of data collection, as can be seen in the speech of the student CO/9th year<sup>4</sup>: “on the internet, in books. We use textbooks well, a lot, and handouts.” It remains to be seen how the internet is used as a research device, since, in the context investigated, we did not obtain data that would allow us to make specific considerations in this regard.

In EP, despite the low regularity of this activity in the classroom highlighted in the statements, the majority of students also stated that they use the internet and the textbook/workbook provided by the school, as expressed (EP/A4)<sup>5</sup>: “On the internet, in the book. Sometimes what is not found on the internet is found in the book and sometimes what is not found in the book is found on the internet” and also (EP/A5): “we use the booklet and the internet”. Considering the fact that the reproductive nature of the information conveyed in this school, revealed in the students' representations of the most frequent activities in teaching practice (exercises/activities, followed by a copy of the table), reinforced by the use of the textbook/workbook, matters question: what has been the contribution of the internet and the textbook/workbook in the process of appropriation of knowledge by the students participating in the research we developed?

It is worth highlighting that the internet as a technological resource for searching data appears prominently in the productions analyzed by Oliveira and Campello (2016), who draw attention to the fact that this resource can facilitate the practice of copying, but, contradictorily, it can encourage student motivation, “curiosity, autonomy and creativity, in addition to avoiding dispersion in the collection of information and facilitating teacher/student communication” (OLIVEIRA and CAMPELLO, 2016, p. 191). Previous studies, which investigated the use of the internet and technology in schools, already referred to the motivating nature of these devices (SILVA, 2006); DIEDRICH 2009). The meager evidence obtained, however, does not authorize us to state, as mentioned, whether the use of the resources highlighted by the students in the study developed, in the two institutions considered, is supported by the arguments of the authors referenced above. Although it can be said, based on the apprehensions made, that, in the case of PE, the situation in question requires particular attention.

The teacher's guidance in carrying out research work was mentioned by the majority of CO students, as one of them (CO/8th year) revealed: “they provide a lot of guidance”. Or as a student also in CO/8th year highlights: “what to do, how to do it, where to research”. Considerations reaffirmed by another CO/9th year student that, in “all assignments, teachers generally take part of the class to explain the assignment; if you have doubts, they explain it again; It is well explained about the work that has to be done”.

This fact contrasts with the findings of Oliveira and Campello (2016), since the

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4. In the case of CO, the interviewed students (11 in number) will be identified according to the year of Elementary School, 8th or 9th year, preceded by CO, at the option of the responsible researchers, at the research opportunity, in order to protect the agreed privacy.

5. In EP, the option, also at the time of the research, was to identify the students (10 in number) by A (EP before) followed by an ordinal number, bearing in mind the reason stated in the previous note.

studies they analyzed revealed the lack and/or precariousness of guidance from teachers consistent with the research work proposed to students.

Regarding research guidance by teachers at EP, a positive statement was also obtained from the majority of students on the grounds that they indicate the topic and delimit the time, expressed as follows: “they spend time, for example, doing it one week and delivering it the next week, they give the themes” (EP/A4). Or as (EP/A1) alludes: “it depends, there are some that are research that has already been done and others have a general theme”. From the students’ expressions, it is possible to infer that the guidance of the EP teachers, unlike the CO, very tenuously touches on the methodological nature of the research, analysis and presentation of results. In other words, as Teixeira (2011, p. 83) highlights, “the practice of asking students for research without giving them any guidance other than a topic is still in force”, when it is known that monitoring in written preparation is fundamental students in completing their work, in addition to the fact that their absence tends to be “directly reflected in difficulties in the next stage” (FAQUETTI, 2002, p.119).

Regarding the destination of the research results, the majority of CO students revealed that the work is presented in a printed version and/or in an expository format in class, with the aim of evaluation by the teacher. In this sense, this is what a CO/8th year student says: “presents to the classroom or printed work, which we do at home and hand in to class”. Or as another (CO/8th year) reports, highlighting the evaluative nature of the research work: “it is normally presented on a sheet that the teacher evaluates later”. EP students, in the same way, state that they deliver the material to the teachers, as per (EP/A5): “We deliver it to the teacher”. Or just transcribe the results into the notebook, as follows: “We just write”

(EP/A9). It is observed that the mere delivery to the professor for evaluation, coinciding in the institutions researched, neglects one of the basic research criteria – communication/socialization of results (BEILLEROT, 2001).

From the speeches of the CO students about the research, we gathered from the representation that this methodological procedure contributes to a better understanding and deepening of knowledge; provides greater dialogue between people; enables different views on the subject studied; constitutes an activity different from class.

In relation to the first sense, the opinion of a CO/9th year Student about the contribution to better understanding and deepening of knowledge is significant, namely: “it is very interesting, because you can delve deeper into the subject and look for other ways of seeing and obtain more information.” Regarding the opportunity for dialogue between students, the position of one of the OC/8th year students is also representative, who says: “I think it’s very good, because the work brings us together with other colleagues, giving us the opportunity to learn more about the work [...]; you are not as focused in class; that usual, very boring thing.” Likewise, the appreciation of one of the CO/9th year students regarding the possibility of having different views on the target topic of the research is also significant, as follows: “I think it’s cool, interesting because it’s a little different [...]; It differs a little from the class, from the material that is normally used. It’s a different way of researching and having different views on the subject.”

The positivity of the research expressed by CO students shows signs of opposing the lack of motivation for research highlighted in the productions analyzed by Oliveira and Campello (2016), due to the precarious guidance regarding the research to be carried out and the lack of concern on the part of teachers in selecting themes contextualized to



the students' experiences. This is because, as we have seen, the students revealed that they had proper guidance for research, including regarding the methodological trajectory, demonstrating that such activity can favor access to different views of knowledge, therefore providing opportunities for their contextualization. In this case, given the limits of the study we carried out, we believe that on-site observation in this sense would be recommended as one of the strategies for a more objective understanding of the qualitative content of its real effectiveness in the institution's daily teaching routine.

The majority of EP students considered the importance of research linked to the fact that one learns more when carrying out activities that are different from everyday life, as (EP/A1) says: "it is good for the student, so that later they will be interested and know where to start researching for yourself" and (EP/A5): "because you learn more; What we didn't learn in class we learn in research." It follows, with less incidence, that it is important to carry out more research work, as this knowledge will be useful in the future, in college and the like, or, simply, because it is worth a grade.

However, it remains to be seen in what aspects the difference between the activity under discussion is configured, related to interest, learning, type of knowledge to be appropriated and its relevance, based on the data that emerged from the representations of the students participating in the study now being summarized.

The reasons given by the CO and EP students, despite the contradictory representations that were perceived in the context of the categories analyzed so far, offered us indications to problematize, think and reflect, that learning more through research may be related to the idea of Ramos (2002, p. 32) that "research means everyone actively participates in the construction of

their own knowledge and in the construction of the knowledge of those they live with [...], investing in systematic questioning and the search for new arguments, new knowledge". Or as Demo (2006, p. 16) states that "research takes on challenging [...] contours, starting with the recognition that the best knowledge is that which knows how to overcome itself. The emancipatory path cannot come from outside [...], but it will be conquest from within, self-construction".

A position that has to do with "the understanding of the teacher as a researcher of his own practice" and significant "repercussions on the development of student autonomy, which [...] sees, in the teacher who experiments, who dares, takes risks and decides, a reference for their own training" (GRILLO, et al, 2006, p.10) and independence. Imperative convenience and importance, especially for students whose fundamental rights – social and human – are precarious.

## **FINISHING...**

In order to revisit the studies developed – synthesized and compared – relating to the social representations of students about research, as an educational principle, from two school institutions in the south of Santa Catarina (one private and the other public), the incursion into their documents (PPP, 2016, PCC, 2008, DCEFC, 2020), revealed to us a certain convergence regarding research as a way of valuing knowledge, historically, produced in the context of students' everyday experiences, aiming at a critical analysis of different areas of knowledge. It therefore situates research as a space for reconstructive questioning and self-elaboration (DEMO, 1994, 2007), subverting truths more prone to regulation and control. There is the desired research intention coinciding in both institutions which, according to the students' social representations, is worrying regarding

its actual practical implementation.

The suspicion is justified because, due to access to the collected data, students' social representations about research come little close to the basic criteria that such a methodological strategy requires. In both institutions, the hegemonic mistakes of school research appeared more evident than the institutional representations defended by us in this regard. Along with the similarities, it is worth highlighting that the strongest level of weaknesses in PE was the lack of regularity in research, the supremacy of reproductive and mechanical knowledge, and poor guidance from the teacher. Items softened in the CO by the students' appreciation, among them, the positive fact of the teacher's guidance, based on the work methodology and not just the target theme and delivery time.

When it comes to students, notably those from less privileged classes, who attend public schools, perhaps the situation tends to cause concern in terms of democratic citizenship. This is because, through such experiences, they may not "extract from their schooling

more than the meaning of a subordinate relationship with knowledge" (SILVA, 1992, p. 134). The disadvantages imposed may not have enough schooling time to recover them. Unlike these, CO students, due to "their global class relations" and, in a certain way, longer stay at school, "will probably [...] have additional chances to compensate for these possible disadvantages" (SILVA, 1992, p. 134).

In this focus, we reiterate the need for greater depth, aiming to overcome the restrictive nature of hegemonic and historical conservative positions. Understanding social representations about research is extremely urgent, as is understanding our own judgments, which we nurture and preserve in the classroom and other sociocultural contexts in which we move. Minimizing the distortions of practices and mistakes in our social representations is necessary, in the desire to strengthen the potential of research as a device for critical questioning, development of creativity, autonomy and freedom available to authorial experience.

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