

Sociology and Education in an Academic Career

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The feature of life that follows aims to reflect on some topics that emerge from my 20 years of academic life, always in deep articulation between Sociology and Education. Without pretending to be thorough, the following topics emerge: the dialogue between sciences; interaction between people; organization and, at the same time, preparedness for the unexpected; classes with an active component; the importance of general culture; the need for permanent updating; publishing implies knowledge systematization; open access as an inevitability in scientific publication.

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Introduction

HAVING, predictably, reached about half of my academic career, which started in 2000 at the University of the Azores in Portugal, the feature of life that follows aims to reflect on some topics that emerge from my 20 years of academic life (1) in an exercise of self-reflexivity (2).

In this reflection, which necessarily has a strong personal brand (3), I hope not to “be breaking open doors” (2), in the sense that it may be too obvious, simplistic or uninteresting. I hope to articulate discursive rigor (4, 5) with the presentation of some of my personal stances (6), but always without mixing judgments of fact with judgments of value in the classical and, to some extent, timeless Weberian sense (7, 8): “[...] after the quality and relevance of personal argumentation is assessed, should take place even without respecting the replication of the research model” (6) (pp.1).

To attain the aim of this text that focuses on academic life (9), through an autobiographical method as a form of self-training (10) and which consists of “The production of the self-narrative, via narrative exercise, [which] allows subjects to reflect on the temporal inscriptions of their existence. The narrative produced is, at the same time, a way of accessing the singu-

larity of a life and the expression of social and historical times. The subject produced in the narrative is, simultaneously, singular and plural” (11) (pp.12), I will focus on some aspects of the academic career (12, 13) such as Sociology and Education, scientific research and dissemination. The text closes with a conclusion of this whole reflection.

Academic Life

In summary of my professional career, I am a higher education faculty member since 2000, having completed in 2013 the PhD in Education – Sociology of Education. I have teaching experience in areas such as Research, Sociology, Kindergarten Teachers Training, and Organizations, among others. Currently, I am particularly interested in Teaching Sociology, Digital Literacy, and Digital Organizations and Society (<https://www.cienciavita.pt/portal/4E19-BF24-A0CA>; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4286-4440>).

Coming from the area of Sociology of Education, I became interested in organizations, especially in the organizational culture (14, 15). Contrary to common judgement, neither the school process, at its various levels, nor its transformation is easily learned as advocated by many common sense discourses (16). I

have learned that, in practice, almost anyone thinks they are “specialists” in schooling/education, contrary to what happens in other scientific areas.

My entire academic career was shaped by the professional need to establish a deep and fruitful dialogue, predominantly between the scientific area of Sociology and Education (17, 18, 19, 20), and even within Sociology, inasmuch that, professionally, my basic training is Sociology but it was necessary to articulate it with teaching, especially at the beginning, when I joined the Department of Educational Sciences (21). Over time, both in teaching and research, I understood from experience the richness and urgency of the dialogue between sciences as being critical to allow, on the one hand, a better understanding of reality and, on the other hand, a more complete training of the students.

My inclusion in a higher education organization implied, both at the beginning and throughout this period, more or less formal interaction with other people, for example, in management, namely directors, colleagues, administrative staff, students, individuals outside the University who needed to be contacted. This interaction is unavoidable even if, more recently, digital technologies have, to some extent, transformed the way it is implemented (22, 23).

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a disruption in life as we were used to (24, 25, 26, 27), even in terms of education and even higher education. One example is the moments of transition to distance learning via the Internet and beyond (24, 28, 29, 30, 31), demonstrating the relevance, also, of social sciences in its apprehension and combat (25), and stressing the centrality of being organized and, at the same time, being prepared for the unexpected (32).

The teaching dimension (33) is very rewarding, for example, with the publication of Arends’ (34) classic work – Learning to teach. It was crucial for me at the beginning. Classes with an active component are paramount, and I started to ascribe, over time and with greater experience, knowledge and confidence, increasing space for this type of classes (21, 35). In this case, the importance of at least sufficient general culture is critical (36).

Likewise, I felt the need for permanent updating (37), both in the way of teaching (38) and in terms of content. In the latter case, research and publication are vital. Publication entails the systematization of current knowledge (4).

The new digital conditions create new ways of life (39) and professionals (40, 41), as well as the open access of scientific publications as unavoidable in the scientific publication (42, 43). Less directly, reviewing papers reviews and belonging to editorial boards of scientific journals (for example <http://bonoi.org/index.php/si/about/editorialTeam>; <https://publons.com/researcher/859777/sandro-serpa/>) help to (i) systematize ideas, (ii) become aware of the most recent research

in my scientific areas at the international level, (iii) create international networks of relationships; and (iv) convey information in a methodical way. All of this can and should, if relevant, be transported to teaching for the benefit of our students and our growing professional quality (23, 30, 31, 40).

Conclusion

From all this accrued experience, I draw, among others, the following conclusions of some relevant elements:

- (i) Dialogue between sciences;
- (ii) Interaction between persons;
- (iii) Organization and, at the same time, preparedness for the unforeseen;
- (iv) Classes with an active component;
- (v) Importance of general culture;
- (vi) Need for permanent updating;
- (vii) Publishing implies knowledge systematization;
- (viii) Open access as unavoidable in scientific publication.

After all this path, I do not believe we are in a situation of social disorder, but rather of hope that is less than fundamental, to which the COVID-19 pandemic contributed, albeit it was not the first nor the only factor.

In this context, Rawls’s (44) reasoning, despite being somewhat dated, remains extremely current and continues to be one of my fundamental references already from my initial training, with the author’s proposal of principles of justice based on a veil of ignorance. In summary,

The justice of a model of society depends essentially on the way how fundamental rights and duties are attributed, as well as on the economic opportunities and social conditions in the different sectors of society (44) (pp.30);

[...] an acceptable theory of justice should tell us which are our rights by telling us what clauses we would have stipulated to regulate the mode of cooperation between each other if we ignored everything that normally interferes with absolute impartiality (45) (pp.138).

In this circumstance, I firmly believe that the dissemination of scientific knowledge (37) is one of the mainstays of a society with greater social justice.

In sum, for an academic of these 20 years, I may conclude that teaching, research and publication seem critical to good professional performance to have a well-founded, knowledgeable and critical position of what one teaches. Following Flough (46) (pp.1), “People have started to see the fact that education is an essential key to a well-rounded development instead of the old mentality of just acquiring a degree and monetary success in life”.

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