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TRANSFORMING EDUCATION: PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATION IN DIVERSIFIED CONTEXTS

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Abstract: The research presented follows an interpretative, organized, and systematic process aimed at the emergence of concepts and practices capable of deepening the understanding of Pedagogical Innovation (PI) across diverse formal, non-formal, and informal learning environments. Conceptually, Pedagogical Innovation is analyzed within a post-modern context, where epistemological and axiological challenges increasingly impact education, particularly schools, which often remain anchored in practices that struggle to foster deep and meaningful learning of an ever more plural, intersubjective, and complex knowledge landscape. The research employs an interpretative meta-synthesis approach, analyzing 107 dissertations and theses in Educational Sciences—Pedagogical Innovation, defended at the University of Madeira between 2007 and 2015. All studies analyzed were qualitative, and the meta-synthesis utilized a meta-ethnographic methodology. Through an inductive process, the research structured successive interpretative syntheses in its first stage, identifying 1,285 conceptual segments that reflect ideas, concepts, or topics relevant to the theme. In the second stage, involving the translation of primary studies (1st Level of Synthesis), 42 significant key concepts were identified. This process culminated in the third stage—Synthesis of Translations (2nd Level of Synthesis)—which led to the formation of five macro-conceptual categories: the construction of competences, teaching professionalism, students' learning experiences, the nature of praxis, and instrumental resources. The conclusions reveal that Pedagogical Innovation constitutes a complex and multidimensional phenomenon rooted in conscious and critical processes of change. These processes emphasize students' capacities and attitudes, linked to pedagogical practices grounded in constructivist epistemological frameworks. Additionally, the findings highlight an inno-

vative praxis that remains deeply localized, limited to micro-intervention environments. The potential of ICT is noted as a valuable tool for fostering new learning approaches under specific conditions. Recommendations are directed at educational institutions, urging them to act as facilitators of collaborative cultural spaces, and at policymakers, advocating for strategies to reduce bureaucratic constraints and enable genuine school autonomy.

Keywords: Pedagogical Innovation, Change, Pedagogical Praxis; Learning Environments

CONTEXTUALIZATION

In contemporary society, innovation has increasingly established itself as a decisive factor for progress and civilizational advancement. It has become a central driving force for economic growth, assuming an omnipresent and dynamic role in the discourse of our ever-evolving world. This continuous transformation impacts not only tangible goods but also knowledge itself, whose life cycles are becoming progressively shorter.

Focusing on the analysis of knowledge construction within the context of school education—historically regarded as the primary authority and monopolizer of formal learning processes—a predominant view emerges: educational institutions, particularly those operating in formal school settings, face considerable challenges in adapting to innovative processes. A widely shared critique highlights the inadequacy of contemporary schools in addressing a rapidly evolving context, where knowledge is increasingly complex and multifaceted. As a result, foundational skills such as creativity, adaptability, critical thinking, and systemic reasoning have become essential to meet the demands of modern society and economies.

Seeking to raise awareness among governments of this growing inability of education systems and, in particular, schools, to cope

with the current demands of the modern “knowledge society”, the Council of the European Union made a recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, highlighting not only the importance of all people having the right to inclusive and quality education, but also, and in particular, the need to develop skills that allow full participation in society and the successful management of transitions in the labour market, considering that “In the knowledge economy, memorizing facts and procedures is essential, but not sufficient to progress and be successful” (Council of the European Union, 2018, p.1). Such a recommendation highlights the heightened awareness of the importance of innovation in education as a response to the demands of the twenty-first century.

In this context, it becomes essential to rethink and redesign existing educational models to ensure that institutions align effectively with the evolving demands of society and contemporary economies. Creating educational environments that are flexible, adaptable, and centered on fostering critical competencies is pivotal for equipping individuals to navigate the dynamic challenges of the modern world.

NATURE OF THE STUDY

It is noted that a very significant set of experiences and pedagogical practices of an innovative nature are widely referenced and analyzed within the scope of numerous academic research works, and the abundant diversity of concepts, perspectives and ideas arising from such research, and considering the multiplicity and diversity of contexts in which such innovative pedagogical practices are developed, constitute a valuable contributing factor to the enrichment of the discussion around this theme.

This is the case of the research line in Pedagogical Innovation of the Centre for Research in Education of the University of Madeira –

CIE-UMa, which has been supporting, since 1993, the study of pedagogical innovation based on the analysis of concrete pedagogical practices, namely those resulting from local paradigmatic changes, that is, pedagogical practices implying the creation of new learning contexts; on fixations on paradigms of the past - traditional pedagogical practices exhibited as “new” or “innovative”, as well as prospective studies on education.

Starting from a concept of pedagogical innovation structured around learning environments characterized by innovative dynamics supported by practices or elements that cause disruption in relation to traditionalist scenarios, the present research aimed to develop an interpretative, organized and systematic process oriented to the emergence of concepts or practices, capable of contributing to the deepening of knowledge and understanding about the reality of the Pedagogical Innovation in concrete educational action, for which he used the analysis of master’s dissertations and doctoral theses defended at the University of Madeira between 2007 and 2015, in the field of 2nd and 3rd Cycle Courses in Educational Sciences in the specialty of Pedagogical Innovation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the modern era, knowledge was basically understood as a set of statements that could be considered true or false in the description of objects or concepts (Lyotard, 2003), thus allowing the creation of large metanarratives aligned with a vision of the supremacy of reason and science in the progressive advancement of humanity. In postmodernity, however, the characteristics of knowledge undergo a significant transformation, as Usher and Edwards (1994) point out, “the postmodern moment also represents a challenge to the existing concepts, structures and hierarchies of knowledge” (p.25), developing a rup-

ture with a positivist and rationalist vision in the dialectic between the subject and reality which comes, among other reasons, from the emergence of the growing complexity of the phenomena that surround us, thus collapsing the belief in the capacity of universal knowledge, objective, the result of the superior capacity of reason and the unshakable faith in the capacity of science. Sousa (2011), in turn, states that post-modernity has implied that we have to live with a knowledge that appears to us in the form of a “fluid, discontinuous, ephemeral, unpredictable and chaotic knowledge” (p.10).

Since the construction of knowledge is the main essence of the educational action developed in the school, it is worth reflecting on the fact that, in contemporary times, the knowledge that it (re)produces, reveal strong evidence that the school institution, as stated by Nóvoa (2005), is still “enclosed in the frontiers of modernity” (p.15). It is in this context that we find, for example, the prevalence of the focus on knowledge as a final product, measured by exams and certifications, in evident contrast to the need to value active learning processes articulated with the application of this same knowledge in real-world contexts. On the other hand, sometimes more “disguised” than others, a model of *traditional pedagogy still prevails*, characterized by a deep-rooted magistrocentrism that relegates the learner to an essentially passive role.

It is in this sense that thinking about change is an undeniable necessity in the present educational panorama, namely in the context of the pedagogical practices developed in schools (or even outside them!), revealing itself as a vital need for the very survival of the school model.

METHODOLOGY

Considering the proposed objective of developing an interpretative, organized and

systematic process, oriented to the emergence of concepts, ideas or models, capable of contributing to the deepening of knowledge and understanding about the phenomenon of pedagogical innovation in educational practice, from the analysis of master’s dissertations and doctoral theses defended at UMa between 2007 and 2015, in the field of 2nd and 3rd Cycle Courses in Educational Sciences in the specialty of Pedagogical Innovation, such a process should result in an interpretative synthesis that would consistently allow us to identify and understand critical elements in these innovative learning environments.

Given that the Primary Studies (PSs) are predominantly qualitative in nature, incorporating ethnographic research methodologies, the development of an interpretative metasynthesis was deemed the most suitable approach for achieving the intended objectives. Regarding the specific methodology to underpin this systematic review of qualitative studies, meta-ethnography was chosen, as it is the most widely adopted method for qualitative synthesis (Toye et al., 2014).

CHARACTERIZATION OF PRIMARY STUDIES (PSs)

Regarding the type of PSs, 82% of them consist of master’s dissertations and the remaining 18% of doctoral theses. The geographical locus where the research took place is predominantly located in Brazil, justified by the fact that, from 2004 onwards, the master’s and doctoral degrees in the research line of Pedagogical Innovation, coordinated by CIE-UMa, had a significant expansion to Brazil, following agreements between the University of Madeira and public universities in that country, so that 75% of the research in this study took place in that country. and the remaining 25% in the Autonomous Region of Madeira.

In the expressive majority of PSs, 38%, the focus of analysis has a multidisciplinary na-

ture, not focusing specifically on practices developed within the scope of a particular discipline or subject area, a situation that was revealed to have an impact on environments where the mono-teaching regime predominates, such as Pre-School and 1st Cycle.

Regarding the level of education, it was found that the investigations that focused on the beginning of schooling - Elementary School (Brazil)/ 1st Cycle (Portugal), were predominant, reaching 39% (although in certain situations in association with other levels. The research environment, in addition to schools 72%, included other educational spaces, such as Hospital, Militar College, Communities of Practice; Technical Training Institution, Cultural Association, Learning in Itinerancy, among many others.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Considering the steps proposed by Noblit and Hare (1999) for the metaethnographic methodology, it is from the analysis resulting from a careful previous reading of the PSs that new macroconceptual understandings on the theme were developed, and in this way, it is possible to go beyond a mere aggregative synthesis of concepts or ideas, which are presented below.

IDENTIFICATION OF CONCEPTUAL SEGMENTS

In this phase, conceptual segments were identified in the PSs, which showed sufficient relevance for consideration in an interpretative discussion, in the focus theme, which, in the present investigation, was pedagogical innovation. In the texts analyzed, key ideas, conceptions, perspectives with sufficient significant expression were identified to consider them as support data for all the subsequent work of progressive synthesis. Thus, 1285 conceptual segments were identified, as ele-

ments capable of integrating ideas, concepts or aspects relevant to the discussion of the theme of pedagogical innovation. The size of such segments is very diverse, varying between segments with a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 169 words, which in practice corresponded to a universe comprising very small textual extracts, sentences, entire paragraphs and even sections involving more than one paragraph. It should also be noted that a very significant number of these segments were pluriconceptual, that is, the same textual extract simultaneously integrated several significant conceptions or ideas to be considered, and therefore to be codified.

DETERMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSS

According to Noblit and Hare (1999), after the identification of the conceptual segments in the various studies, there is a need to determine their relationship throughout them, so at this stage an analysis was carried out focused on the search for recurrent and common concepts that emerged transversally throughout the PSs, in the various conceptual segments. Functionally, a grid was organized, in which the 1285 conceptual segments identified were related according to a recurrent pattern of meaning between them.

TRANSLATION OF STUDIES INTO ONE ANOTHER

This was one of the most important stages, and corresponded to the 1st level of synthesis based on, and from, the 1285 conceptual segments already properly integrated in an inter-related way, in the previous stage. According to Toye et al. (2014) it aims to identify a set of ideas or metaphors that translate key concepts, which were, in this investigation, extracted from the analysis of the conceptual segments previously identified. The operationalization of this translation process took place throu-

gh the use of the *constant comparison method*, which is also characteristic of the qualitative methodology of the Grounded Theory. These key concepts were created inductively, trying to capture as faithfully as possible the meaning and content of each segment, and it can be considered that they correspond to a first level of categorization.

A total of 42 key concepts were identified, given that, due to the need for clarity and precision, only the key concepts that were clearly identifiable from the determination of the relationship of the conceptual segments in the various PSs were considered.

TRANSLATION SYNTHESIS

This stage represents a subsequent stage of synthesis within the metaethnographic methodology, concretizing the continuity of an interpretative process that seeks similarities and differences. Now, this search takes place among the 42 key concepts previously codified at the first level of synthesis, resulting in a second level of categorization. This second level of categorisation gave rise to 5 main categories, namely:

<i>Key Concept</i>	
i.	<i>Areas of competence and learning;</i>
ii.	<i>Vision of educational agents;</i>
iii.	<i>Students' learning experiences;</i>
iv.	<i>Nature of pedagogical practices;</i>
v.	<i>Resources involved;</i>

Table 2 Categories of Key Concepts

Based on the relationship between the key concepts and the categories established from them, the resulting grid is as follows:

Categories	Key Concepts
i. Areas of competence and learning	Capabilities and Attitudes
	Enhancement of the Cultural Component
	Constructivist Nature of Knowledge
	Content Reformulation
ii. Vision of educational agents	Dynamics of Genesis
	Theory-Practice Interrelation
	Training
	Professional Learning Communities
	Mediation Function
	Reflexivity
	Political/Critical View
	Autonomy of Action
iii. Student learning experiences	Research
	Humanist Vertente
	Collaborative Dynamics
	Active Involvement
	Motivational Factor
	Identity Expression
iv. Nature of pedagogical practices	Situated Learning
	Prior Knowledge
	Micro Level of Intervention
	Student-centricity
	Horizontal Interaction
	Artistic Expressions
	Transformative dynamics
	Creative Dynamics
	Diversification of Practices
	Disruption Dynamics
Inclusive Practices	
v. Resources involved	Project Work
	Specific / Institutional Projects
	ICT-Structural Limitation of Technology
	ICT-Prescriptive Logic
	ICT-Development of Skills and Attitudes
	ICT-Peripheral Mediation Teaching
	ICT-New Contexts / New Forms of Interaction
	ICT - Expression of Creativity
	ICT - Sociocritical Expression
	ICT- Research Support / Source of Information
	ICT - Learning Personalization Support
	ICT - Construction of Artifacts
	ICT-Traditionalist Teaching Action
	ICT - Context Limitation

Table 3 - Grouping of Key Concepts by Categories

<i>Key Concept</i>	<i>Conceptual Segments Absolute frequency</i>	<i>Conceptual Segments Relative frequency</i>	<i>Nr. of PSs</i>	<i>Nr. of PSs Relative frequency</i>
<i>Situated Learning</i>	93	6,5%	50	46,7%
<i>Autonomy of Action</i>	21	1,5%	18	16,8%
<i>Capabilities and Attitudes</i>	110	7,6%	49	45,8%
<i>Student-centricity</i>	85	5,9%	50	46,7%
<i>Professional Learning Communities</i>	11	0,8%	9	8,4%
<i>Prior Knowledge</i>	23	1,6%	18	16,8%
<i>Collaborative Dynamics</i>	53	3,7%	32	29,9%
<i>Creative Dynamics</i>	12	0,8%	10	9,3%
<i>Dynamics of Genesis</i>	99	6,9%	52	48,6%
<i>Disruption Dynamics</i>	14	1,0%	12	11,2%
<i>Transformative dynamics</i>	106	7,4%	57	53,3%
<i>Diversification of Practices</i>	26	1,8%	21	19,6%
<i>Active Involvement</i>	43	3,0%	35	32,7%
<i>Identity Expression</i>	19	1,3%	11	10,3%
<i>Artistic Expressions</i>	31	2,2%	15	14,0%
<i>Motivational Factor</i>	22	1,5%	17	15,9%
<i>Training</i>	24	1,7%	17	15,9%
<i>Mediation Function</i>	34	2,4%	28	26,2%
<i>Theory-Practice Interrelation</i>	45	3,1%	23	21,5%
<i>Horizontal Interaction</i>	17	1,2%	16	15,0%
<i>Investigação</i>	10	0,7%	8	7,5%
<i>Constructivist Nature of Knowledge</i>	20	1,4%	16	15,0%
<i>Micro Level of Intervention</i>	15	1,0%	13	12,1%
<i>Specific/Institutional Projects</i>	28	1,9%	19	17,8%
<i>Inclusive Practices</i>	19	1,3%	8	7,5%
<i>Reflexivity</i>	27	1,9%	19	17,8%
<i>Content Reformulation</i>	11	0,8%	8	7,5%
<i>ICT - Construction of Artifacts</i>	6	0,4%	4	3,7%
<i>ICT - Socio-Critical Expression</i>	7	0,5%	2	1,9%
<i>ICT - Expression of Creativity</i>	9	0,6%	6	5,6%
<i>ICT - Context Limitation</i>	3	0,2%	3	2,8%
<i>ICT - Learning Personalization Support</i>	3	0,2%	3	2,8%
<i>ICT- Research Support / Source of Information</i>	9	0,6%	7	6,5%
<i>ICT-Traditionalist Teaching Action</i>	12	0,8%	9	8,4%
<i>ICT-Development of Skills and Attitudes</i>	43	3,0%	20	18,7%
<i>ICT-Structural Limitation of Technology</i>	17	1,2%	3	2,8%
<i>ICT-Prescriptive Logic</i>	2	0,1%	2	1,9%
<i>ICT-Peripheral Mediation Teaching</i>	13	0,9%	11	10,3%
<i>ICT-New Contexts / New Forms of Interaction</i>	50	3,5%	22	20,6%
<i>Project Work</i>	12	0,8%	10	9,3%
<i>Enhancement of the Cultural Component</i>	41	2,8%	21	19,6%
<i>Humanism</i>	24	1,7%	15	14,0%
<i>Political/Critical View</i>	21	1,5%	16	15,0%

Table 1 - Frequency of Key Concepts

The synthesis of the translations, oriented towards an interpretative sense, explored a narrative construction that considered an integrated and relational view of these five main categories, together with the key concepts and the previously identified conceptual segments. This synthesis process represented another step in a progressive dynamic of construction of a holistic interpretation that was not just a simple sum of the parts, but the development of an integrative process of concepts, metaphors and ideas in a coherent conceptual scheme in relation to the reality of pedagogical innovation in diversified educational contexts.

Given the interest in developing an interpretative level supported by the categories and key concepts constructed, resulting from the studies of the theme of pedagogical innovation, the expression of the synthesis took the format of an *argument line*, given that it allows the development of an argumentative narrative which is projected beyond the mere aggregation of the contents of the PSs (Barnett-Page & Thomas, 2009). This narrative expression of the synthesis of the translations is concretized in the conclusions that are presented below.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

One of the primary aspects to highlight is pedagogical innovation, which is grounded in conscious and critical processes of change, characterized by a complex and multidimensional nature. This multidimensionality is evidenced by the fact that most pedagogical practices identified as innovative extend far beyond the traditional cognitive domain, emphasizing the development of competencies in three key areas: knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

In the cognitive domain, innovative practices focus on activities that require the application of theoretical knowledge to practical contexts, challenging students to think critically, solve problems, and devise creative solutions.

In the domain of skills, these practices generally promote autonomy, collaboration, creativity, and students' metacognitive abilities. Finally, with regard to attitudes, the emphasis lies on pedagogical practices committed not only to fostering critical thinking but also to upholding cultural values, citizenship, and social responsibility. These innovative practices represent a break with the traditional teaching model, centered on the teacher and memorization. They pave the way for a more comprehensive curriculum and deeper learning, which takes into account the identity and subjectivity of each student.

The research also revealed how school culture often acts as a barrier, isolating teachers in their innovative endeavors. This reality manifests through a lack of collaboration and engagement among teachers, which hinders the dissemination of promising initiatives. In this context, it became evident that innovative practices typically stem from the individual efforts of motivated teachers, who demonstrate a strong commitment to interpreting their specific contexts and introducing changes to their pedagogical practices. These educators, invariably driven by a genuine interest in innovation and experimentation, play a pivotal role in initiating transformative actions within their classrooms.

The findings underscore how the initiative and determination of motivated teachers are fundamental to implementing innovative practices, as they adapt these practices to the unique contexts in which they operate. However, this insular characteristic, while not detracting from the success of classroom experiences, highlights a significant limitation: the restricted potential for replication and broader growth. The research found that these innovative practices often remained confined to isolated "events," failing to evolve into a sustained process of continuous transformation within the school environment.

To address this challenge, it is essential to move beyond the individualistic culture that dominates many schools and foster the creation of professional learning communities. Such communities would promote collaboration among teachers, enabling the exchange of ideas, mutual support, and the development of a collective commitment to innovation as an ongoing, systemic process.

The spaces of microautonomy as facilitators of pedagogical innovation, in a school context, was another characteristic that was manifested with a strong emphasis, in fact, in coherence with the insular aspect of innovative pedagogical practice, mentioned above. It was found that pedagogical innovation depended decisively on the ability of teachers to take advantage of the scarce “fringes” of autonomy that they have, namely in terms of classroom management, contents, methodologies and various projects, which contributed decisively, and significantly, for teachers to be motivated and believe in their potential to continue to improve student learning through the introduction of changes in their pedagogical praxis, leading them to think and act differently in the context in which they developed the action.

Regarding ICT, it was found that they were supported by a very significant number of primary studies related to innovative learning environments. The research revealed two profoundly diverse and opposing realities, varying in a *continuum* between a merely additive concept, as another tool to reinforce or complement a current traditionalist praxis and, in this sense, unable to support a true transformative perspective of support for pedagogical innovation; while on the other hand, a concept was manifested, in which ICT revealed a disruptive potential, by supporting the emergence of differentiated and transformative learning environments and pedagogical practices – with special emphasis on the development of reading and writing skills

– thus facilitating the emergence of new mediation formats in the processes of knowledge construction.

Finally, the triad of ‘wanting,’ ‘knowing,’ and ‘being able to’ stands out as a fundamental framework in the process of change that underpins pedagogical innovation. On one hand, teachers exhibited a strong desire, expressed as a deep commitment to improving learning. This desire was often pragmatic in nature, with a critical perspective on praxis oriented toward immediate, context-specific solutions, tailored to address particular challenges. On the other hand, the importance of knowledge emerged, specifically the know-how required to enact change. This knowledge was often exercised through the individualized actions of teachers, relying heavily on instinct, perception, and situational awareness. Consequently, pedagogical innovation was found to be deeply rooted in individuality, reflecting the teacher’s capacity to independently analyze contexts, weigh the advantages and disadvantages of potential solutions, and construct practical approaches to change.

Lastly, the element of ‘being able to’ highlighted how innovation in pedagogical praxis was closely tied to the teacher’s ability to assert genuine autonomy. This capacity for affirmative, independent decision-making was shown to be a critical factor in fostering innovation—though it remains notably scarce in many contemporary school contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of innovative learning activities and environments, spanning a wide range of pedagogical contexts, highlights the richness and diversity of solutions that materialize pedagogical innovation in practice. This metasynthesis thus provides valuable insights to support reflection on how to enhance and catalyze innovative pedagogical practices across multiple educational scenarios.

For teachers, who often operate in increasingly complex and unpredictable environments characterized by growing standardization and bureaucratization—where the search for quick, statistical solutions tends to prevail—it is crucial to believe in the possibility of thinking and acting differently. Transformative and alternative pedagogical practices should aim not only at fostering students' cognitive development but also at cultivating their skills and attitudes. Central to this process is the teacher-student interaction, which serves as the foundation for implementing change and gradually constructing pedagogical innovation.

However, this willingness to innovate should not be a solitary endeavor but rather a shared and collective effort among colleagues, built within a culture of debate and collaborative exploration of ideas. Only through such collaboration can pedagogical change be consolidated and sustained over time, moving beyond isolated initiatives and fostering a mindset of continuous learning and adaptation.

At the institutional level, particularly within schools, it is imperative to shift away from a strictly functionalist and institutional view of change. Instead, spaces must be created to nurture a culture of collaboration and idea-sharing. This requires a genuine commitment to transforming practices, challenging entrenched beliefs, and fostering critical pedagogies that prioritize deep and meaningful learning.

As for educational policymaking institutions, three fundamental priorities emerge. First, there must be a progressive debureaucratization of administrative processes that currently consume excessive time and limit teachers' capacity to pursue innovative alternatives. Second, greater support for institutional autonomy is needed, enabling schools to tailor teaching strategies to the specific needs and characteristics of their students. Third, significant investment in technological resources should be accompanied by robust teacher training programs to ensure the effective use of these tools in developing innovative and transformative pedagogical practices.

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