

DOSSIÊ “Pro-Posições 30 anos”

Pro-Posições and higher education^{1 2 3}

Pro-Posições e o ensino superior

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Abstract

As the Pro-Posições journal celebrates its 30th anniversary, the author analyzes the presence of higher education topics in the journal and its different approaches in articles it has published since its creation. This analysis is based on a search for articles, identification of authors and contents in the physical and digital archives of the journal from March 1990 to April 2017, and a dialog the author tried to establish between this material and the field production of studies and research on higher education in this period. The main results of this analysis include the journal's contemporaneity in an emerging research field in Brazil and its effort to address disciplinary diversity and theoretical perspectives in higher education themes in the study period.

Keywords: Pro-Posições; higher education; university; higher education research field; Brazil.

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Resumo

Nos 30 anos da revista Pro-Posições, focaliza-se a presença do tema ensino superior e de suas diferentes abordagens nos artigos publicados no período. A análise se apoia no levantamento dos textos, seus autores e conteúdos nos acervos físico e digital do periódico no período de março de 1990 a abril de 2017 e no diálogo que procurei estabelecer entre esse material e a produção no campo de estudos e pesquisas sobre ensino superior no mesmo período. Como principais resultados, destacam-se a contemporaneidade da revista em relação a um campo de pesquisas ainda emergente no Brasil e o esforço em contemplar a diversidade disciplinar e de perspectivas teóricas no tratamento conferido ao tema ensino superior no período sob análise.

Palavras-chave: Pro-Posições; ensino superior; universidade; campo de pesquisas sobre ensino superior; Brasil.

Introduction

Although higher education has been frequently addressed in studies of different fields – such as history, sociology, education, and others – the recognition of higher education importance in contemporary societies and the transformations that national systems had in the last 50 years helped place higher education in the perspective of a broad public debate at international level (Neves; Sampaio & Heringer, 2018, p. 23).

Some quantitative data illustrate these transformations – scale changes and global deconcentration of higher education enrollment. In 1900, there were 250 universities in the world; in 1940, 400, and in 1970, this number reached almost 1,000 in the Western world. Enrollment number also grew significantly: in 1900, university students totaled 500,000; in 2000, 100 million, or 20% of the global population aged 18 to 24 years old (Clancy *et al.*, 2007). In this century, 51.7 million new students were added, most of them in regions so far with low participation in global higher education enrollment, such as East Asia and the Pacific (Unesco, 2019). In Latin American and Caribbean countries, higher education enrollment increased from 1.9 million in 1970 to 8.4 million in 1990, reaching 28 million in 2017 (Unesco, 2019)⁴. In this

⁴ In the last decade, a remarkable increase was reported in higher education enrollment in India and China, with currently 10 million and 17 million higher education students, respectively, the largest amounts in the world (Kishore, 2015; Yuzhuo & Fengqiao, 2015).

process of expansion, besides the classical 19th-century university, different types of institutions emerged, such as non-university establishments focused on a more specialized training, which eliminated the equivalence existing for centuries between university and higher education (Dougherty, 1997; Riesman; Jenks, 1968; Schofer; Meyer, 2005; Schwartzman, 2014; Trow, 1973). Since then, higher education, due to its characteristic that embraces the diversity of post-secondary education institutions and their configuration in different national systems, has become more appropriate for studies analyzing behaviors, processes and structures of institutions, and their targeted audiences.

Therefore, the first studies focused on higher education are relatively recent, starting in the United States in the 1970s and spreading to other regions of the world in the following decades (Martins, 2012)⁵. Now consolidated, this new field of research presents two distinct characteristics: use of different theoretical and methodological approaches to investigate higher education in its various dimensions; and, due to this attribute, its multidisciplinary character (Neves; Sampaio; Heringer, 2018).

In Brazil, this new specific field of research about higher education, its roles in society and organization and governance models emerged in late 1970s. In the country, just as in other regions, it does not mean absence of prior studies about university, but the emergence of a specific field of studies about higher education⁶.

The early phase is characterized by individual productions of academicians who addressed the origin of university, its models of organization and governance in Brazil, and challenges, as well as other areas of interest. Two books were relevant in late 1970s: the trilogy written by Luiz Antonio Cunha about the evolution of higher education from the colonial period to the military dictatorship years⁷, and a book written in 1979 by Simon Schwartzman and colleagues about different dimensions of higher education (Neves; Sampaio & Heringer (2018).

⁵ Sociological studies about university or education were conducted before the 1970s, but we emphasize here the emergence of a specific field of studies and research in line with the transformations that higher education went through and issues raised with such changes (Neves; Sampaio & Heringer, 2017).

⁶ Among the studies focused on university preceding the emergence of a specific field of research about higher education, we highlight Fernando Azevedo (1938), Vieira Pinto (1962), Anísio Teixeira (1968), Darcy Ribeiro (1975), Florestan Fernandes (1975). Refer to Neves; Sampaio & Heringer (2017).

⁷ The trilogy books are: *Universidade Temporã* (1980), which addresses higher education from the colonial period to the Vargas era; *Universidade Crítica* (1983), about higher education in the period of populist governments; and *Universidade Reformada* (1988), about higher education during the military civilian dictatorship years.

During the 1970s and 1980s, higher education was analyzed in several studies in the country, which, according to Cunha (1981), is due to the national political context itself: first because of the relevance of higher education in the context of military government policies; then the author explains the constant interest in this topic to support the official discourse around a connection between university and economic, scientific and technological development and the perception of a continued institutional crisis in a scenario of absent government policies (Cunha, 1981). Indeed, in the wake of the 1968 Reform, an increase was reported in the number of studies that, from different perspectives, analyze the educational policy in its different dimensions (Cunha 1975; Durham, 1995; Fávero, 1990; Freitag, 1977; Oliven, 1989; Veiga, 1985; Vieira, 1982). In the beginning of the democratic period in 1985, *Ciência & Cultura* journal of SBPC - Sociedade Brasileira para o Progresso da Ciência (Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science) published an article titled *Suplemento Universidades brasileiras: organização e problemas* (Insert - Brazilian Universities: Organization and Problems).

While the national political context led to increased interest in higher education studies and analyses in the country according to Cunha (1981), a relatively consolidated field of research about higher education was observed worldwide (Torres, 1998; Gumport, 2007). This field was supported by the organization of knowledge production, through research groups in hundreds of foreign universities and the dissemination of research results at international congresses, academic events, and specialized journals.

The impact of this international movement in Brazil in late 1990s can be observed in at least two aspects. The first refers to the way research is organized in centers and groups of researchers from different disciplines, but with common interests⁸. The second refers to a theoretical perspective: with the contributions of Clark (1983), the higher education system and its institutions become the focus of studies (not only public universities), leading to an expansion

⁸ Research centers and groups created in late 1980s include: Núcleo de Pesquisas sobre Ensino Superior (Nupes), of the Universidade de São Paulo, created in 1989 and no longer existing; Grupo de Estudos sobre Universidade (GEU) of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), created in 1988; Núcleo de Estudos sobre Universidade (NESUB) of the Universidade de Brasília; Centro Interdisciplinar de Pesquisas para o Desenvolvimento da Educação Superior (Cipedes) of the UFRGS; Programa de Estudos e Documentação Educação e Sociedade (PROEDES) of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro; Observatório Universitário linked with the Universidade Cândido Mendes, in Rio de Janeiro; Centro de Estudos sobre Ensino Superior e Políticas Públicas para a Educação (CESPE) of the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais; Laboratório sobre Acesso e Permanência na Universidade (LAP) of the Universidade Federal Fluminense; Laboratório de Estudos de Educação Superior (LEES), created in 2014 and that gathers researchers and professors from several areas of Unicamp; Laboratório de Pesquisa em Ensino Superior (LAPES), and most recently, Laboratório de Estudos e Pesquisas em Educação Superior (LEPES), both at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro.

and diversification of research in this area (Neves; Sampaio & Heringer, 2018). Indeed, Brunner (2009), when analyzing the evolution of research about higher education in Brazil, highlights the collective character of such production. According to him, this research field consolidation is supported by the development of a network of researchers and multidisciplinary research centers linked with postgraduate programs, which is not seen in the same period in other Latin American countries, for instance in Chile (Brunner, 2009).

In the 1990s, studies about higher education in Brazil tended to address the origin, configuration, presence of the private sector and, above all, the transformations in the national higher education system since late 20th century; in recent years, topics related to policies to expand the access to this level of education and their impacts on the system have been highlighted (Neves & Martins, 2016).

This article, which is part of the 30th anniversary dossier of Pro-Posições journal, analyzes the presence of higher education in the studies it has published since its creation. The author also seeks to identify the main topics addressed and different perspectives of analysis, based on the emergence and consolidation of a field of studies and research about higher education worldwide and in Brazil, and changes in the editorial field related to scientific publications and their impact on the institutionalization of Pro-Posições journal.

This article has three sections: introduction, methods and results (subdivided into specific topics), and final considerations.

Method and results

This is a qualitative study that seeks to articulate the empirical data obtained from documentary research and data interpretation based on relevant studies.

In the first stage of this study, articles were identified from the physical and digital collections of Pro-Posições journal using the following descriptors: “higher education,” “higher education system,” and “university.” The study period was March 1990 (when the first issue of the journal was published) to April 2017. The search based on the descriptors above identified 54 articles about higher education published by the journal. Most of them include a dossier about a specific higher education topic. During the study period, four dossiers about higher education were published, one every seven years on average.

The second stage of this study consisted in the organization and analysis of all studies identified. After reading their abstracts, the articles were grouped by subject and/or theme and year/period of publication. When the abstracts were vague and/or insufficient to clarify the topic, the articles were read in full⁹. The keywords indicated in the studies do not always correspond to the themes/subjects assigned here, as they were organized in a table of themes corresponding to the field of studies and research about higher education¹⁰.

Finally, the third phase this study focused on the three thematic dossiers about higher education published between 1994 and 2009 and a thematic issue published in 1995. The dossiers, in order of publication, address the following topics: higher education as a research field (1994); European and Latin American policies and trends (2004), and student mobility between Portuguese-speaking countries (2009). The thematic issue of the journal is an assessment, titled *Avaliação institucional da universidade* (Institutional Evaluation of Universities), of March 1995.

⁹ During the study period, the editorial board shows growing concern about correspondence between abstracts and respective articles.

¹⁰ This procedure avoids keywords limited to the Brazilian reality (such as names of scholarship programs, for example) and broad analytical categories that do not indicate themes related to the field of research about higher education (such as liberalism, neoliberalism, authoritarianism, capitalism, etc.).

With the publication of three dossiers and, especially, a thematic issue about institutional evaluation, Pro-Posições recognizes the relevance of higher education as a theme of studies and analyses. The author decided to analyze the dossiers and thematic issue in detail as they resulted from an editorial decision, unlike spontaneous articles of continuous flow submitted to the journal.

In the following sections, the author presents the main results of this study that analyzed Pro-Posições articles about higher education for a better understanding of the emergence of the field of research about higher education in Brazil to which several disciplinary areas contribute, adding new elements to the institutional trajectory of Pro-Posições journal as it celebrates its 30th anniversary.

Themes and periods

Since late 20th century, studies about higher education have covered a growing list of topics and issues. They emerge, are studied, then some disappear, and others are reformulated due to their relevance to the understanding of the dynamics of different national higher education systems in their relationship with societies. Pro-Posições, over its 30 years of publications, covers a wide variety of topics and concerns regarding higher education.

Table 1 matches two variables: subjects/themes addressed in articles and period of publication in the journal, separated by periods: 1990-1995; 1996-2000; 2001-2005; 2006-2010; 2011-2015; 2016-later, showing that most articles about higher education were published in the 1990s (32 out of total 54 articles) and a wide variety of themes are addressed in the articles.

Table 1 - Themes and period of publication of articles about higher education. Pro-Posições journal, 1990-2017.

Themes	1990 - 1995	1996 - 2000	2001 - 2005	2006 - 2010	2011 - 2015	2016 - later	Total
Didactic/pedagogical project; learning; syllabus	2						2
History of university			1				1
Higher education as a field of research	2		1				3
Institutional evaluation	12	1					13
University and society (extension)	1						1
University: governance, management and organization	2					1	3
University: autonomy, identity, mission and culture	3	1	1				5
University and research	3						3
Higher education, trends and challenges (at global level)			1				1
University students: learning/academic performance, sociability, student experiences	1	1			1	1	4
Higher education systems			2		1		3
Higher Education policies		2	3	1	1		7
Internationalization of higher education; student mobility		1	2	5			8
Total	26	6	11	6	3	2	54

Source: Developed by the author based on a search on Pro-Posições physical and digital archives.

Based on this context, and using the table as a guide, the author identified general aspects regarding the frequency and topics of articles.

- Almost half (46.4%) of the articles were published in the first five years of the journal. In this period, two of the four higher education dossiers were published. Considering that a dossier consists of five articles on average, a reasonable number of studies were published in these early years.
- ‘University’ is a recurring theme of articles and throughout the period. Some texts explore research and extension activities as part of the tripod that constitutes it; others discuss the principle of university autonomy, institutional identity, culture and mission of a university; that is, they address characteristics that distinguish universities from other institutions in society. In general, these studies of a strong normative character do

not consider the results of empirical research, but refer to interpreters of the ideas included in the Humboldtian model of higher education.

- The theme ‘university student’ includes, in this organization, education studies that address learning processes, study habits, academic performance, and university sociability¹¹.

Institutional evaluation is the most frequent topic of the articles about higher education, mostly published in the first five years of the journal – in total, 13 articles are about this subject, 12 of them were published in 1990-1995. This expressive number of articles is due to a special issue of the journal containing 11 articles based on a national seminar held at the School of Education at Unicamp¹².

- The theme ‘higher education policies’ has been present since the second half of the 1990s, in the context of policies adopted by then President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002), and remained throughout the analyzed period. During Luís Inácio Lula da Silva’s administration (2003-2010), the focus of studies was on the effects of policies to expand access to higher education, particularly public student funding programs, such as Fies - Fundo de Financiamento ao Estudante do Ensino Superior¹³ and Prouni - Programa Universidade para Todos¹⁴ for students enrolled in private higher education institutions; the effects of admission policies, such as Enem - Exame Nacional de

¹¹ The themes ‘university student’ and ‘public policies for higher education’ are overlapped, especially when talking about the most recent policies to expand access. However, the author chose to exclude articles that specifically address these policies, such as Enem, Prouni, Fies, etc. from the theme ‘university students’ since the focus was on the policies implemented, not the student benefiting from the programs. Regarding student mobility, the author also chose to include it in the topic of internationalization of higher education, as this is the title of a dossier.

¹² The event was promoted by the Grupo de Estudos de Pesquisas sobre o Ensino Superior (GEPES) of Unicamp School of Education, then coordinated by Professor José Camilo dos Santos Filho, who was also editor-in-chief of Pro-Posições. Then, although the theme of institutional evaluation is part of the public policy, it is discussed individually in this study.

¹³ Although Fies has existed since 2001 (Law 10.260 of July 12, 2001), the program was reformulated and expanded in 2011 under Dilma Rousseff’s administration.

¹⁴ Prouni was created in 2005 (Law 11.096 of January 13, 2005). To join Prouni, a private higher education institution must have a good evaluation from SINAES - Sistema Nacional de Avaliação da Educação Superior. For an analysis of Prouni development and program, see Sampaio (2014).

Ensino Médio¹⁵; and affirmative actions, such as the Quota Law for federal universities¹⁶.

- The theme ‘internationalization of higher education’ is addressed in nine articles during the period. This significant number is due to the publication of a dossier titled *Ensino superior e circulação internacional de estudantes: os Palop no Brasil e em Portugal* (Higher education and international student movement: the Palop in Brazil and Portugal), in 2009, which contains six articles about academic mobility as one of the dimensions of higher education internationalization. The other three articles discuss the Bologna process, universities in Mercosur, and higher education in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall.
- A notion of higher education system is used in three articles published in 2000-2010, whose authors were linked with foreign institutions – one from Chile and two from Argentina. Although the articles analyze the effects of higher education policies in the respective countries of the authors, using a notion for the field of research about higher education set these studies apart from others developed by national authors published in the journal.
- Finally, the theme ‘higher education as an area of study and research’¹⁷ was addressed in a dossier published in 1994, organized by the then editor-in-chief Professor José Camilo dos Santos Filho who also wrote the opening article titled *O ensino superior como área de estudos e pesquisas: a experiência internacional* (Higher education as an area of study and research: an international experience). This publication highlights the journal focus on the field of research about higher education. For the first time, ‘higher education’ appears in articles published in the journal – in the title of the dossier and the titles of three of its four articles, all written by professors from the School of Education at Unicamp. Santos Filho (1994) highlights the fact that higher education is a recent

¹⁵ Enem was created in 1998 to evaluate the quality of education. It is a test held annually by INEP - Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Anísio Teixeira, an institute linked with the Ministry of Education, consisting of objective questions and a text to be written by the student. Since 2009, this test has also been used as a mechanism of access to higher education in public universities, through SISU - Sistema de Seleção Unificada, and in private institutions to apply for a Prouni scholarship and/or Fies educational credit.

¹⁶ Law 12.711, Decree 7.824, of August 29, 2012, and MEC Directive 18, of October 15, 2012, regulate the quota for self-declared black, brown and indigenous students in federal institutions.

¹⁷ Title of the dossier about this topic.

research field and attributes its emergence to the recognition of the importance of university institutions in the current world “for the scientific and technological development of nations” (Santos Son, 1994, p. 5). Ten years later, Krotsch and Suanábar (2004), in an article published in Pro-Posições, discuss again higher education as a research field from the perspective of its development in several Latin American countries.

In order to have a clear picture of the presence of higher education in the articles published in Pro-Posições, the following sections will show the authors of the articles, their institutions, and the characteristics of the three dossiers and the special issue of the journal dedicated to higher education.

Authors and affiliations

Of all 54 articles addressing higher education published in Pro-Posições journal over a period of almost 30 years, only eight authors are repeated – seven from Brazil and one from Argentina¹⁸ – reflecting the journal’s concern about diversity of authors when addressing this theme.

However, despite such diversity, in the first ten years of the journal, most authors of higher education articles were from Brazil and professors at the Unicamp School of Education (Table 2).

¹⁸ The authors of multiple articles were: Afrânio Catani (2, one as co-author), José Camilo dos Santos Filho (3), José Dias Sobrinho (3), João Francisco Régis and Moraes (2), João Ferreira de Oliveira (2, both as co-author), Newton Cesar Balzan (2), Stella Cecília Duarte Segeineich (2), and Claudio Suasnábar (2).

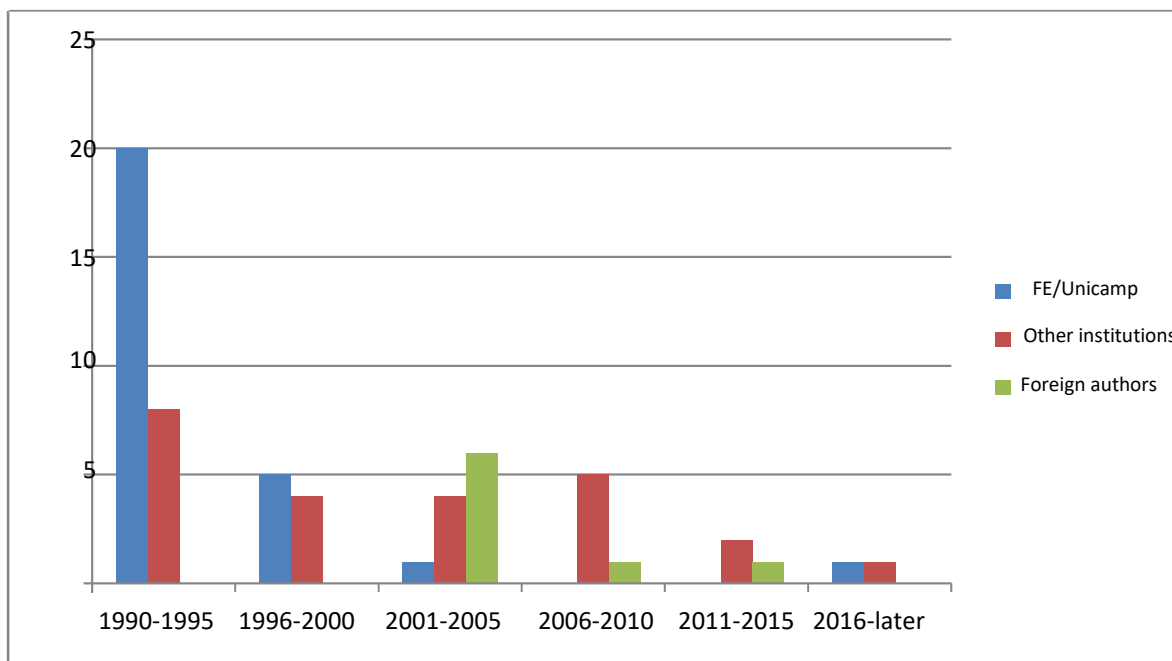
Table 2 – Authors, affiliations and publication period - Pro-Posições journal, 1990-2017.

Authors and affiliations / Period	Brazilian authors		Foreign authors	Total
	School of Education / Unicamp	Other higher education institutions		
1990-1995	20	8 (3 with multiple affiliations)	0	28
1996-2000	5	4	0	9
2001-2005	1	4	6	10
2006-2010	0	5	1	6
2011-2015	0	2	1	3
2016-later	1	1	0	2
Total*	27	24	8	51

Source: Developed by the author based on a search on Pro-Posições digital archive.

*The number of authors does not correspond to the number of articles because of repeated authors and articles with more than one author.

Graph 1 - Authors, affiliations and publication period. Pro-Posições journal, 1990-2017.



Source: Developed by the author based on a search on Pro-Posições digital archive.

Graph 1 illustrates a gradual decrease in the number of authors of articles about higher education from Unicamp School of Education (except in the last five years, considering the

period is still not over). On the other hand, an increase is reported in the number of articles by authors from other Brazilian and foreign institutions, especially in 2000-2010.

In 2011, as indicated in Tables 1 and 2, the number of articles about higher education started to decrease. This change is possibly associated with two factors: the consolidation of Pro-Posições journal and the development of the field of research about higher education in the country.

In its early days, academic journals in Brazil were, above all, an instrument for the dissemination of studies conducted by professors and researchers of the institution that issued them, and their existence was supported by this purpose: disseminate the results of studies and investigations conducted in the educational and/or research institution, making them public. The editorial boards of journals were responsible for ensuring regular publication of issues and encouraging the academic community to collaborate with new studies. The endogeneity that was commonly seen in most academic journals was also present in Pro-Posições in its first articles about higher education. Besides this general trend, the editor of Pro-Posições, Professor José Camilo do Santos Filho, was also the coordinator of a group focused on studies about higher education at the School of Education¹⁹. These concomitant activities apparently had opposite but converging effects, as they helped expand the presence of higher education as a theme for reflection and research in the journal through the publication of articles by professors of the institution itself. On the other hand, they also attracted the contribution of professors and researchers linked with other institutions and disciplines, including foreigners, whose studies about higher education brought innovation to the debate. The special issue about higher education evaluation, published in 1995, illustrates this change, as most authors of the articles were from other Brazilian higher education institutions.

In 2000-2010, two other movements contributed to a greater diversity of authors and topics about higher education in articles published in the journal. The first movement refers to the consolidation of the field of research about higher education and the recognition of its importance for contemporary societies. As seen above, starting in the 1990s, several higher education research groups and centers were created in public universities in Brazil, which

¹⁹ This is GEPES – Grupo de Estudos e Pesquisas sobre Educação Superior.

increased the number of studies linked with foreign literature and the dissemination of different approaches to this theme²⁰. These topics were attractive to Brazilian academicians because, from a national perspective, they promoted reflections about and reactions to existing policies, or absence of them, adopted during the various authoritarian and democratic governments (Cunha, 1981), and because they had become very relevant at international level for the development of different societies in an increasingly globalized world (Martins, 2019).

The second movement refers to Pro-Posições professionalization in terms of rules for publication, including guidelines for article submission and proposed thematic dossiers and blind peer review of submitted studies. Mandatory participation of foreign authors in thematic dossiers led to increased number of authors from other countries in the journal. The first dossier has a significant number are foreign authors, particularly from Latin American countries, linked with higher education institutions in Argentina, Chile, Mexico and Venezuela, and with strong academic interactions with researchers from higher education research centers in Brazil. The second dossier about European and Latin American policies and trends includes three foreign authors whose studies are part of the international field of research about higher education; the other four authors are from Brazil, but not professors at Unicamp School of Education.

The dossiers

The three higher education dossiers published by Pro-Posições are very different from each other and internally as well, due to the diversity of topics, approaches and the dialogue in this field of research. The common aspect among them is the proposal to address issues related to post-secondary education, that is, higher education.

²⁰ In Social Sciences, Burton Clark (1983; 2001) developed higher education sociology in the North American context, addressing themes such as the academic profession; organizational structure of institutions; university governance; class, race and gender inequalities in the access to higher education. See also Gumpert (2007) and Neves; Sampaio & Heringer (2018).

The first dossier, *O ensino superior como área de estudos e pesquisas* (Higher education as a field of studies and research) (1994), as noted above, shows the view of the editor-in-chief about the relevance of the topic and its boundaries. According to Santos Filho (1994):

“Problems of field definition, lack of clarification of its objectives, poor theoretical development, presence of much pamphlet literature, and lack of systematization of knowledge are some of the most serious limitations of this new specialized knowledge field in the broad area of education.” (p. 5)

In order to ensure greater clarity to the new field of study, the author proposes:

“(…) to characterize the specialized field about higher education, seek to identify its origin and development and briefly describe its structure both as postgraduate programs and the creation of scientific and professional societies, research centers and specialized journals.” (Santos Filho, 1994, p. 5).

In the ten-page introduction, Santos Filho (1994) presents the objectives of the dossier, highlighting knowledge about this specialized research field. He mentions foreign authors, national and international associations, centers and groups of research about higher education abroad and in the country, and international specialized scientific journals that were introduced in the country through subscriptions. At the end, the author highlights:

[the relevance of] “studies and research about all dimensions of the academic work of universities and the higher education system as a whole as important tools for improvements in the university system and institutions” (Santos Filho, 1994, p.14).

However, only one article in the dossier seems to fulfill the expectation of its organizer: “a study conducted by Newton César Balzan suggests potential effectiveness of research about the development of quality education” (Santos Filho, 1994, p. 4). In his study, Balzan (1994) shows the results of an empirical study conducted with students of Unicamp graduate courses in order to learn about the positive and negative aspects of the education system offered by the university. Balzan (1994) reports the reciprocal relationship between institutional evaluation and education quality, anticipating the concern about this theme to be addressed in a special issue of the journal the following year. Institutional evaluation, to be discussed later, has been discussed since early 1990s in academic groups, in the corridors of the Ministry of Education in Brasília, and in incipient centers and groups of higher education research in the country.

However, in early 1990s, most articles about higher education published in Pro-Posições started to present a philosophical reflection about the nature (identity), mission and purpose of universities in society. The idea that empirical studies about higher education could promote democratization of access, improve education quality and policies in this field, and help obtain a better understanding of the national system had not yet been assimilated by the academic community.

The second dossier (2004) was published ten years after the first dossier. Organized by Gepes and introduced by professors Elisabete Monteiro de Aguiar Pereira and José Dias Sobrinho, the second dossier titled *Educação superior: algumas tendências políticas européias e latino-americanas* (Higher education: some European and Latin American political trends) has seven articles, three of which are from foreign researchers, and more articles, a greater presence of authors from other national or foreign institutions, and the topics covered, as the title indicates, vary greatly: the Bologna process, studies about higher education systems in Latin America, contemporary university trends, student funding programs (Prouni), higher education privatization processes, higher education policies in Brazil in the administrations of Presidents Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Lula, market culture and university, and the legacy of the University of the Federal District.

Despite the diversity of themes and the different types of investigations, the 2004 dossier somehow fulfill the expectation revealed ten years before by Professor José Camilo Santos Filho as he addressed higher education as a field of studies and research at international level. In this sense and with a similar concern, in the 2004 dossier, the article by Professors Pedro Krotsch and Claudio Suasnábar, both from the Universidade de La Plata, Argentina, shows a review of studies about higher education in the Latin American context and particularly in Argentina.

For Krotsch and Suasnábar (2004), although the field of studies and research about higher education was still incipient in Latin American countries when compared to developed countries, it was growing fast. However, they noted that although higher education systems had grown and taken different paths since the 1960s in Latin America, studies about them in the region still faced limitations, contributing to delayed development.

(...)“perduró en el sentido comum institucional la concepción tradicional de la universidad como espacio esencializado em torno de la idea de institución central de la nación, lo cual dificulto y aún y aún dificulta pensarla como organización. La reflexión sobre la universidad se expresó em este contexto como saber filosófico-político de fuerte contenido idealista que presente ainda en el discurso universitário, no se condice com el actual desarrollo y complejidad del sistema” (Krotsch & Suasnábar, 2004, p. 48).

The understanding of these authors about the delayed development of the field of research about higher education in Latin American countries and their criticism regarding the ‘essentialist’ reflection of the university that persists in the academic environment are in disagreement with the other articles of the dossier. Although higher education had already become an active field as reported by Bourdieu (1983), the perception of this process was still restricted.

The third dossier titled *Ensino superior e circulação internacional de estudantes: os Palops no Brasil e em Portugal* (Higher education and international student circulation: the Palops in Brazil and Portugal) (2009) has six articles and an introduction section by its organizer, Professor Neusa Maria Mendes de Gusmão. Focusing on higher education and the international circulation of students in the context of African countries and international relations between Portuguese-speaking African countries (Palops) and Brazil and Portugal, the authors of the articles, based on concrete experiences, analyze the role of higher education, bilateral support, cooperation and their effects. Linked with the disciplinary field of anthropology, the articles have no dialogue with the specialized literature of the field of research about higher education, although they address the phenomenon of internationalization and one of its dimensions: student mobility.

Institutional evaluation in perspective: the special issue of the journal

In 1995, Pro-Posições dedicated a special issue to the theme of institutional evaluation as a collection of studies presented at the 1st Brazilian Seminar on Institutional Evaluation of Universities, promoted by Gepes – Grupo de Estudos de Pesquisas sobre o Ensino Superior of Unicamp School of Education²¹.

A quick retrospective is presented to measure the importance of this publication that year. Since the 1980s, higher education quality was a frequent topic in public debate. In 1985, a committee was created to propose evaluation policies for the higher education system. Mobilizing various higher education actors, including bureaucrats from the Ministry of Education, policy makers, higher education scholars, professor associations, etc., the proposals developed by the committee, which included Professor Simon Schwartzman as the rapporteur, caused many controversies (Cunha, 1985).

Legal issues such as the constitutional provision of university autonomy, State funding to the public sector, criteria for choosing the indicators to be used in the evaluation of institutions, and other operational issues were discussed but with no consensus among the different segments of higher education and the federal government (Sampaio, 2000). In 1992, discussions about quality were reconsidered by the Minister of Education and members of the academic community who supported him, but, once again, no practical results were achieved. Strong opposition from academia, both in 1985 and 1992, prevented higher education evaluation from becoming institutionalized as a State policy, although some evaluation projects had been adopted by some public and private universities.

Despite resistance to evaluation proposals of the government, since the mid-1980s a consensus was observed regarding a quality crisis in higher education that affected both the professor training and the professional perspectives of students. Although quality did not mean the same thing for the different segments of the higher education system²², the topic of higher

²¹ The seminar was held on October 25-28, 1994. The editor of the journal said: “We selected the most relevant studies of broader interest presented in this seminar to constitute the 1995 thematic issue of Pro-Posições.” (Santos Filho, 1995, p. 4)

²² Neves (1995) highlights initiatives of community universities in Rio Grande do Sul, such as incentive projects to improve the degree and work situation of their professors. Other initiatives in the period included seminars promoted by Ibraqs - Instituto Brasileiro de Qualidade em Serviços, which gathered a large number of supports of private higher education institutions. In the public sector, especially in federal universities, quality crisis was diagnosed through discussions about public funding crisis from the federal government (Sampaio, 2000).

education evaluation was included in the public agenda and ended up mobilizing university managers and professors, policy makers, and researchers working in the new field of studies and research about higher education. This mobilization around institutional evaluation lasted practically until the approval of the 1996 Guidelines and Bases Act and its importance can be measured considering the large amount of material produced about it: reports and articles on daily media, compilations of different experiences of institutional evaluation in public and private universities in Brazil, articles in academic journals²³, etc.

The special issue of Pro-Posições about higher education evaluation has 11 very distinct articles: accounts of institutional evaluation experiences in Brazilian universities (Unicamp, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Universidade de Brasília, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, and Universidade São Francisco), more theoretical texts about the proposal and nature of evaluation (Santos Filho, 1995; Cunha, 1995), a political text (Trindade, 1995) in which the author, then president of Andifes - Associação Nacional de Docentes das Instituições Federais de Educação Superior, defends the proposal of an institutional evaluation (PAIUB), instead of an external evaluation of the university, and three other articles also contrary to the evaluation because, according to the arguments of their authors, it would violate the principle of university autonomy. All texts reflect the movements of the university community in view of the inexorability of higher education evaluation as a public policy.

After reading this dossier published ten years after the redemocratization of the country and almost a quarter of a century ago, some considerations should be made. The first refers to what Torre (1995) calls 'phases of a decision process.' According to him, reforms in democratic contexts are primarily a political operation that occurs in stages. It comprises the construction of a public problem, then the timing of its incorporation in the political agenda, and the moment it takes effect. In this decision-making structure, the actors that influence the inclusion or non-inclusion of the policy in the agenda are also important. Regarding the policy formalization, it depends on the institutional resources available and the political space allowing decisions to be made. From problem diagnosis, in this case, quality (or lack of) in higher education, to

²³ One of these journals is AVALIAÇÃO, issued by Unicamp in partnership with Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, with a focus on higher education evaluation.

implementation of an evaluation policy for higher education institutions, many stages occurred, and this special issue of Pro-Posições is part of this process.

Another consideration refers to the obsolescence of implemented policy. If steps should be respected before policies are effectively instituted, when are they exhausted to the point of being almost innocuous? Are there similar but reverse steps to be performed until an implemented policy is dismantled? Over the last decades, a robust system of higher education evaluation was developed in Brazil, combining external evaluation and self-evaluation, quantitative and qualitative indicators. This system, seeking to cover different dimensions considered essential for an understanding of higher education quality, has become too complex and is today ineffective in terms of discernment and correction. Today, as in 1995, a broad debate is needed about higher education evaluation in Brazil, based on new terms and perspectives²⁴.

Final considerations

To honor Pro-Posições journal in this 30th anniversary dossier, the author of this study proposed to review it based on a familiar theme – higher education – for almost the same period.

Throughout the journal's trajectory, higher education has been addressed regularly in its multiple aspects, disciplinary areas and theoretical perspectives. In the first years of the journal, this theme received more attention from research professors linked with Unicamp School of Education involved in post-secondary education. Since the first decade of 2000, besides a greater presence in the journal of authors from other educational and research institutions in Brazil and abroad, its articles started to discuss new themes as a result of the changes in the higher education system worldwide and, in particular, the national system. Recent topics addressed in the journal include policies to expand access to higher education (and its impacts), student mobility, commodification and privatization processes of higher education, among others.

²⁴ A recent diagnosis by a team of OECD experts about higher education evaluation system in Brazil also shows its poor ability to identify institutions in terms of quality. Most institutions tend to present average to unsatisfactory performance, which does not drive improvements in quality of higher education in the country (OECD, 2018).

By making room for still incipient themes and topics in the 1990s, Pro-Posições – today celebrating its 30th anniversary – reveals its boldness. Its articles about higher education published in the period ensured a better understanding of the early days of this research field in the country and the journal’s professionalization process towards a special qualified position among indexed academic journals.

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