

The place of the theory in educational policy research

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Abstract: Our goal in this text is to discuss the place theory has occupied in educational policy research. Firstly, we present brief remarks about the concept of theory to signal implications and consequences of their presence / absence in educational policy research. Subsequently, we analyze the role of theory in educational studies, in order to score a critical and creative dimension. Thirdly, we present the consequences of withdrawal from theory and the weakening of the concepts of knowledge, considering teacher development and the formation of researchers. The argument we have developed is epistemologically anchored at the interface of a pluralistic and rationalist theoretical perspective taken in its critical-analytical epistemological positioning, besides the epistemological approach of complexity. Thus, we make use of robust and flexible concepts that allow us to understand, clarify and explain the proposed problem, that is, to seek a satisfactory answer to the question: *What is the place and the importance of theory in educational policy research?* In this way, we designed a theoretical analysis that seeks to explore complex and diverse interactions, considering the field in which such problems are located, namely the educational policies and their relationship to the research.

Keywords: Theory. Research. Epistemology. Educational policy.

O lugar da teoria na pesquisa em política educacional

Resumo: Nosso objetivo, no presente texto, é problematizar acerca de qual é o lugar que a teoria tem ocupado na pesquisa em política educacional. Para isso, num primeiro momento, apresentamos

breves considerações a respeito do conceito de teoria, a fim de sinalizar implicações e consequências de sua presença/ausência nas pesquisas em política educacional; num segundo momento, analisamos o papel da teoria nos estudos educacionais, a fim de pontuar sua dimensão crítica e criativa; e, no terceiro momento, apresentamos as consequências do recuo da teoria e a fragilização das concepções de conhecimento, para a formação de professores e pesquisadores. A argumentação que desenvolvemos está ancorada epistemologicamente na interface de uma perspectiva teórica pluralista e racionalista, tomada em seu posicionamento epistemológico crítico-analítico e enfoque epistemológico da complexidade. Desse modo, nos valem de conceitos robustos e flexíveis que nos permitem compreender, elucidar e esclarecer o problema proposto, ou seja, buscar uma resposta satisfatória para a pergunta: *qual é o lugar e a importância da teoria na pesquisa em política educacional?* Projetamos uma análise teórica que busca explorar as complexas e diversas interações postas pelo campo em que se localiza tal problemática, ou seja, das políticas educacionais e de sua relação com a pesquisa.

Palavras-chave: Teoria. Pesquisa. Epistemologia. Política Educacional.

El lugar de la teoría en la investigación en la política educativa

Resumen: Nuestro objetivo, en este texto, es problematizar cuál es el lugar que la teoría ocupa en la investigación en política educativa. Así, presentamos en un primer momento breves consideraciones acerca del concepto de teoría con el fin de señalar implicaciones y consecuencias de su presencia/ausencia en las investigaciones en política educativa; en un segundo momento, hacemos un análisis del papel de la teoría en los estudios educativos, con el objetivo de marcar la dimensión crítica y creativa; y, en el tercer momento, presentamos las consecuencias de el retiro de la teoría y la fragilidad de las concepciones de conocimiento, para la formación de profesores e investigadores. La argumentación que desarrollamos está anclada epistemológicamente en una interfaz de perspectiva teórica pluralista y racionalista en su posición epistemológica crítico-analítica y el enfoque epistemológico de la complejidad. De este modo, nos valem de conceptos robustos y flexibles que nos permiten comprender, elucidar y aclarar el problema propuesto, es decir, buscar una respuesta satisfactoria para la pregunta: *¿Cuál es el lugar y la importancia de la teoría en la investigación en política educativa?* Proyectamos un análisis teórico que busca explorar las complejas y diversas interacciones relacionadas a la problemática, es decir, de las políticas educativas y de su relación con la investigación.

Palabras clave: Teoría. Investigación. Epistemología. Política Educacional.

The absence of theory leaves the researcher prey to unexamined, unreflective preconceptions and dangerously naïve ontological and epistemological *a priori*s. I shall wail and curse at the absence of theory and argue for theory as way of saving educational studies for itself.

(Ball, 2011, p. 92).

Initial Words

Our goal, within the limits of this text, is to question about what is the place that theory has occupied in research in educational policy. For this, at first, we present brief remarks on the concept of theory in order to signal implications and consequences of their

presence/absence in research on educational policy; secondly, we analyze the role of theory in educational studies, to punctuate their critical and creative dimension; and, following, we present the consequences of withdrawal from theory and the weakening of the conceptions of knowledge, the training of teachers and researchers. The argument we developed is anchored epistemologically at the interface of a pluralistic and rationalist theoretical perspective, taken in its critical-analytical epistemological positioning and epistemological approach to complexity. Thus, we made use of robust and flexible concepts that allow us to understand, clarify and explain the proposed problem, it means, seek a satisfactory answer to the question: what is the place and the importance of theory in research in educational politics? However, we do not assume the predominance of a set of concepts over others, but work at the interface of these we consider productive. So, we designed a theoretical analysis that seeks to explore the complex and diverse interactions placed by the field in which is located such issues, it means, the educational policies and their relation to the search.

We consider it important to approach the problem due to the centrality realized by several authors, the discussion of the ways the research in educational policy has historically assumed worldwide. We can take for example the writings of Espinoza (2009); Souza (2014); Krawczyk (2012); Diogenes (2014); Martin (2011); Mainardes et al. (2011) and Tello and Mainardes (2012), as well as the discussions promoted by the Latin American Network of Epistemological Studies in Educational Policy, through events, publications and joint research groups. Thus, we hope to contribute to the debate about the epistemological assumptions on which we anchor our research.

Brief considerations about the theory conception

Theory is a polysemic, complex and controversial term. Fairly often we hear in our daily lives and even in educational settings, common sense manifestations expressing that "classes are very theoretical," that "in theory, things are one way, but in practice it is quite different" that "such a teacher is great in theory, but what he/she teaches has little application in practice," or "university studies are too theoretical and impractical", among other notes. All these expressions are carriers of a great deal of ingenuity associated with a high degree of conceptual misunderstanding of what is being said. However, if this is often pronounced, it means that these expressions are not simply spontaneous and everyday

manifestations, but concepts embedded in the way we understand the knowledge about the world.

The polysemy of the term theory is in their own dictionaries. If we take the New Aurélio XXI Century (Ferreira, 1999, p. 1944-1945), we will find more than a dozen definitions for theory, among which are: "speculative knowledge, merely rational"; "set of fundamental principles of an art or science "; "systematized opinions"; "general notions, generalities"; "utopia, chimera"; "group of knowledge not naive that have varying degrees of systematization and credibility, which purports to explain, clarify, interpret or unify a given domain of phenomena and events that offer practical activity"; "from a strictly formal point of view, system of propositions that are not contradictory propositions, or the axioms or theorems that are deduced from them."

The complexity is felt even more when we turn the term into an adjective , and then we have "science theory", "communication theory", "shape theory", "information theory", "literary theory", "theory of relativity", "theory of resonance", "theory of ideas", "theory of composite particles", "chaos theory", "theory of knowledge", "*quantas* theory", "political theory", "economic theory", "educational theory", and many other denominations, which comes to border on the infinite. This variety of definitions and applications of the theory show that , even with all the preconceptions that may exist about it, it becomes present in the everyday world, in the way we understand the occupations and the educational universe.

However, before this conceptual complexity that moves from spontaneous to epistemological, we need to consider epistemologically, as reminds us Paviani (2013, p. 49), one meaning of the theory in science is that "the set of concepts and propositions (definitions) about a particular goal or field of knowledge and also the set of results for a given scientific research "and thus, as researchers, we are called to move critically in this conceptual complexity and recognize its historicity. Disregarding the criticality and the historicity of the theory may lead to occurrence of more barriers than advances in knowledge production. If we return to Paviani (2013, p. 48), the origin of the term theory , we realize that the meaning comes from the words "vision" and "contemplation", and such understanding refers to the Greek culture in which " its meaning is linked to the public spectacle phenomenon, presentation or a solemn parade and, finally, it is close to the act of contemplate as opposed to the notion of active life". It is necessary, however, to emphasize

that this origin is rooted in history and that it implies the need to recognize its limits before the contemporary context, characterized by its complexity and challenges us to think about the role of theory as a set of skills that help to understand and explain the problems posed by the context. However, it should be noted that this task can serve both for the analysis in a linear and technical perspective, as critical and dialectical. It is in this political and epistemological tensioning that we intend to address the place of theory in educational studies, since it is not the objective of this trial to carry an etymological and exhausting work of the word theory, but show the implications and consequences of their presence / absence in educational policies. Let us begin, then, the tensioning proposed discussing, according to Ball (2011), *the indispensable role of theory in educational studies*.

The theory in educational studies

In his text *Intellectuals or technical? The urgent role of theory in educational studies* (2011), Stephen Ball (2011, p. 80) speaks of his concern about the direction that educational studies have taken, which are marked by "indiscriminate appropriation of utility languages and 'not - reflexives'" and the "intellectual isolation, as the educational studies purposely ignore the significant theoretical development in fields of cognate knowledge", stressing that all this has proved to be harmful to the educational researches. From the case analysis of Sociology of Education, Ball shows how these factors were taking shape and influencing educational studies, making the "scientific design and technical for research, debates and conflicts that link policies to values and morality be replaced by a mild rationalist empiricism, and the best one can hope for is to be an integrated critical" (p. 84); thus it is possible to realize that the technical-instrumental dimension is gaining ground at the expense of intellectual-critical dimension, and the direction of research determined by the logic of "resolver technicality problems" (p. 84) at the expense of the theory as "vehicle for 'thinking different' [...] arena for 'bold hypotheses' and 'provocative analysis'" (p. 93). This preference is evident, according to Ball (p. 85-86), in studies of the effectiveness of schools, which place the responsibility for the performance of students exclusively in schools and in the actions of teachers, ignoring or silencing explanations that seek to understand the school educational processes related to social and economic context. This scenario points to "significant work discursive and disciplinary [...] made by research on the effectiveness" (p. 86), which makes it even more pressing when "linked to accountability notions, school

evaluation and development planning school "(p. 86). Before this perspective, it is easy to understand the consequences for educational research of a speech and a scientific practical based in the technical-instrumental dimension, in which the expert figure, bearer of effective revenue, gains relevance.

However, there is a way out, that for Ball (2011), lies in the resumption of educational researches by the bias of critical reflexivity. From this perspective, educational problems, their actors and contexts, are considered in their concreteness, however, the understanding is constructed through a critical questioning of social and political practices that take place there. Thus, scientific analysis would be possible, but not disconnected from political and social problems, in other words, neutral and disinterested, but included in the political agenda. In the words of Ball (p. 89), "the scientific vocabulary may distance the researcher (and the manager) of his/her subject, but at the same time, creates a fixed observation point which makes 'social landscape' ever more visible". For him, this would lie the critical reflexivity possible by the theory as 'vehicle to think different,' 'arena for bold hypotheses and provocative analysis'. That is why it claims to, as shown in full in the epigraph of this text, that the lack of theory limits the researcher's work, since the world of reading this is restricted to naive preconceptions, both ontologically as epistemologically, which would significantly compromise the production of scientific knowledge in the educational field.

The absence of theory, reported by Ball (2011, p. 92) as an obstacle to critical and creative thinking researcher, just prevent what is the function by excellence of critical reflexivity consisting of seeing in another way, to see beyond what is given, and therefore it is susceptible to immediate and spontaneous perception. The retreat of theory, according to Ball (2011, p. 92-93), is felt also in "other areas of the educational field, for example, the removal of the theoretical work of teachers training courses and concomitant reduction of such training the development of skills and competences and training to work." These facts show the passage of the "intellectual effort" to "technical process", which is indicative of a professor conceptual and researcher who has the obligation to be able to give satisfactory and efficient answers to educational problems, using tools that allows turning around with ease in the working world. Note that "turn around with ease" cannot include critical and creative capacity, only ability to solve immediate and spontaneous problems, offer solutions, recipes for "bad schools" turn into "good schools" through efficient and effective practices (Ball, 2011, p. 87).

However, it is worth remembering that the theory does not build itself to criticism, it is an opportunity, if not the most important, to "de-familiarize present practices and categories, to make them seem less self-evident and necessary, and open up spaces for the invention of new forms of experience" (Ball, 2011, p. 93), but their use can cater to different interests. On the one hand, it can provide comfort for academic activities, because it would save the researchers of a world that is becoming more complex; on the other, it can serve the reproduction through repetition of rules and laws, contributing nothing to enhance creativity and intellectual criticism. In such cases, it would only serve as a crutch, which only leads to prevent the fall of a body that can no longer be balanced by their own forces. This is what happens, according to Ball (2011, p. 96), with educational studies in which "too often, the theory becomes just a mantra reaffirmation of a belief rather than a tool for research and think of other ways." That is, while we repeat the old theoretical mantras, we dedicate ourselves to an improvement only of repetition, not the intellectual challenge of rethinking what was previously thought aimed the creation. Thus, it establishes the practices of theorizing avaricious, closed and convinced of their validity, revealing more certainties than doubts, more ambition than modesty. However, the theories that seek to anchor in a certain amount of doubt, uncertainty, in recognition of the complexity, open space for the happening of reflexivity on its own production and pretensions of social knowledge (Ball, 2011).

In this second stage, lies the possibility of critical reflexivity, both the investigator's office and in relation to knowledge produced. We realize, here, the possibility of addressing the challenges posed to educational research in Brazil, appointed by Gatti (2012): (i) lack of conceptual precision and theoretical and methodological rigor, which places the problem of the position of coherence and identity, both in the area of dialogue among themselves and with other areas, which replaces the difficulty regarding the explanation of the philosophical and epistemological contributions that support the analyzes; (ii) the definition of the academic field itself and of research, that, even maintaining its plural nature, it needs to be as epistemologically investigative field as epistemologically investigative field; (iii) clarification of the relationship of the educational field with social demands, "not getting the flavor of circumstances or the superficiality with which the questions are put on the demands or from them. It is about the consistency in the construction of the problems in the educational field and of critical exercise" (Gatti, 2012, p. 21). Such problems mentioned

by Gatti draw attention to the epistemological statute of developed educational researches, which requires us to understand what is the place that the theory and the knowledge of conceptions have occupied in the formative spaces of educational researchers, either in initial training, either postgraduate level.

The retreat of theory and fragilization of knowledge conceptions

It was borrowed from Moraes (2003, 2009) the idea that there has been a visible "withdrawal from theory" not only in education and educational policies, but also in the social practices, economic and political. Since the end of World War II and significantly since 1960, we have seen loud noises caused by changes in the social, economic, political, scientific and educational. Such changes caused strong and decisive questions in the traditional forms of knowledge. Education, elected naively as a strategic factor to confront the deep and frenetic transformations, it is also seen surrounded by unknowns about its direction. Traditional forms of schooling, the old educational references, pedagogical canons so successful, both during the first and the second industrial revolution, could no longer have the same efficiency in times of uncertainty. For all this, it is necessary a new pedagogy and educational project.

In Moraes analysis (2009, p. 26), it is in this context that there is a new speech: "it is not enough to educate, it is necessary to ensure the development of 'skills' (transferable skills), value to a process which, however, it is not the same for everyone." While for a few it is required and provides opportunities high levels of learning and cognitive sophistication that goes beyond the practice immediately (know how), for the vast majority it is "enough" and "useful" the domain of "certain powers" necessary for the "tacit known" required by the infamous labor market.

The consequences of these changes and the materialization of this speech are felt in the school's ground, "in university formation", in the workplace, in the course settings, in educational guidance, in media rhetoric and conduction of educational policies. The course of education, from that path are reported by Moraes (2009, p. 26) as follows:

We seek to, at any cost and in any way, to adapt students and teachers to the new reality; public demand grows for the assessment of educational systems, administrators and teachers; reduces the financing of education at local, state and national levels with impacts on salaries and education of all kinds; it increases the demand for distance education and

continuing; it is perceived psychological and physical pressures in different ways of learning.

The hard-hitting educational salvationistic speech, linked to the idea of "competence", "learning to learn", "learning throughout life", produces a substantial decrease in the understanding and interest of society in general and those involved with specific mode of education to realize the contradictions masked by the discourse itself. Thus, it marginalizes the teacher in the classroom, resources are wiped, curriculums are shortened withdrawing their theoretical subjects and "unattractive", the teacher is blamed for school failure, training courses are reduced, it instrumentalizes up and harass the theory as responsible for low efficiency and effectiveness of the school and the university in times of change. In the words of Moraes (2009, p. 27), "theories are seen as mere speeches about the world, forms of expression devoid of any privileged ontological status or, more directly, as constructs, incommensurable language games and no subject". This hostilized and twisted design theory ends up producing an impoverished view of knowledge, reducing it to one of the many "knowledges", placing "practice" as the only teleology of the educational process. In Moraes denunciation (2009, p. 28), "the fascination of the mode of operation of the educational act in everyday school life transforms the experience in the limit of intelligibility", in other words, "the stories or daily school reports" are transformed into prescriptions, bled over into a "must-be" in which occurs the "overvaluation of subjectivities of teaching" rather than a reflective and epistemological understanding of the educational act. So, this overestimation of the practice denounced by Moraes (2009, p. 29), "is no longer necessary, therefore, to apprehend the process of knowledge production, since it is sufficient to pursue socially justified beliefs which show to be reliable guides to get what we want."

Moraes (2009, p. 30-31) criticizes the "epistemology of practice" related to teacher training that has received wide acceptance in the field of education, including in educational research. For example, the author criticizes Tardif (2000) for advocating "an epistemology of professional practice" as opposed to academic knowledge, theoretical and scientific; also criticizes Schön (1997; 1998), for overvalue the "tacit knowledge" and "knowledge acquired through experience" and have relegated to the background "school knowledge". Similarly, it criticizes Perrenoud (1999) for proposing a "small cultural revolution" to reverse the priority of the "logic of education" to the "logic of the training."

These "epistemology of practice" end up producing a professor increasingly pragmatic, short-sighted, action-oriented, "takers" and weakened in terms of scientific and philosophical training. It is, in the words of Campos (2002, p. 86), "another kind of professional education, whose social legitimacy rests not on knowledge that has or transmits, but on skills building and that enables into the living with increasingly complex situations and uncertain." The skills of this teacher in the fields of analysis (2002), are anchored in both the proposed "training constructivist" as in "active methods" and the "active psychologies" that have marked the agenda of Brazilian educational proposals of the mid-twentieth century. These "epistemology of practice" are highly seductive and functional because hierarchical positions of knowledge for its usefulness (Moraes, 2004), convince by the "sharp operationalism" and build one supported speech on "empirical adequacy and its instrumental utility" (Moraes, 2009, p. 31).

Bhaskar (1993, p. 4) criticizes these proposals based on "practice epistemologies" by the absence of three key dimensions of knowledge: a) lack of differentiation, by homogenizing the reality by experience; b) lack of depth by limiting the real to the immediate level and restrict understanding the merely empirical, the immediacy of appearance; c) absence of an open future, by indicating the new impossibility. Given these absences, we clearly have the retreat of theory and a visible phenomenon of "penetration of managerialism in education" (Shiroma, 2003, p. 71), "teacher lack of intellectualization" (Shiroma, 2003, p. 74), the de-politicization of their training and the election of the technical model of teacher training.

The retreat of theory is also felt as a result, Moraes evaluation (2009, p. 32), the presence of certain "pedagogy" to "shy away from research in the area." When this happens, teachers feel "powerless to interfere and act in the real world" (Duayer and Moraes, 1998, p. 106-107), owing to the difficulty of designing situations that go beyond the empirical phenomenon or the immediacy of the event.

The theory in research on educational policy

When we refer to research in educational policy, we ask, necessarily, for the production of knowledge linked to education, more generally, in educational policy, in the strictest sense. Thus, it would be up the following question: what is the nature of the knowledge produced in research on educational policy? We could refer immediately to the answer: we produce scientific knowledge about educational policy. When we refer to the production of

scientific knowledge, we may incur both a narrow view of what is such production, as reported in the previous items, as an epistemologically expanded vision, in which the theory as a theoretical-methodological effort of understanding and capacity for critical reflexivity (Ball, 2011) is gaining ground.

So we need to reattach the question: what is the role of theory in research? Karl Popper, important Epistemologist of the twentieth century, says, in his work *Logical of scientific research*, that "theories are networks, launched to capture what we call 'the world': to rationalize it, explain it, master it. Our efforts are towards making the meshes of increasingly narrow network" (1975a, p. 61-62). Taken in due proportion, Popper's metaphor helps us understand the place of theory in our studies. This is, primarily, because the networks are the result of a creative process, that is, because they were conceived, designed and woven by someone with a purpose, we could claim to be to solve a minimally satisfactory way of problem, using it, to the knowledge already available, however, with opening for creativity, for the projection of new modes of understanding. The network production process helps us to understand, by analogy, the research building context, that is, it is a creative process of putting problems and search for attempts at resolution, however, it does not occur in a vacuum but from certain practical, theoretical and methodological frameworks that support the subject in the design and placement of its problem, as well as in trying to solve this.

Thus, by proposing the construction of a new network, the use of networks already built by others, from which we can create new networks, that is, the use of knowledge ever produced to build others. However, our networks can not be woven in any way, they need certain rigor that makes them able to articulate and produce new understandings, because, otherwise, we would still lay the old networks to capture the same problems and reach the same explanations and interpretations since, by itself, they are not able to analyze and critically and reflective what is captured. Therefore, intentionality and skill of those who play networks and gather them is crucial in the process to explain, describe and interpret, because that is when that happens the process of analyzing of what was captured , about you, build an understanding . In this context, we might ask: are the theories that allow us to put a particular problem, or the problem that drives us to seek certain theories to understand it? According to Popper (1975b, p. 318), "the hypothesis (or theory, or expectation, or whatever it is called) preceding the observation," since "only with our

assumptions we learn what kind of observations we do: where we should direct our attention; where to have an interest ". With this position, Popper (1975b, p. 313-314) criticizes the conception that claims to be the production of knowledge about the world the accumulation of perceptions or experiences that can be acquired spontaneously and thus remain, through at least, by a process of organization and systematization This understanding is called by him of "bucket theory of science or theory of mental bucket", according to which perceptions "are the raw material that flows from the inside out of the bucket, in which it undergoes a process (automatic) - something like digestion or perhaps with a systematic classification [...]" (Popper, 1975b, p. 314). In this conception of science, observation acquires essential role, as it would capture and put the problems. However, in Popper's view (1975b, p. 314 - emphasis added), observation is an active process that requires the viewer planning and observation, as "we do not 'have' an observation (as we can 'have' an experience of directions) but we 'do' an observation" and thus "whenever a note is preceded by a particular interest, a question or a problem - in short for something theoretical".

So "cast the nets to capture the world" is not something that is done selflessly and spontaneously, but in a deliberated and planned way and, as such, it will drive both the analysis of network conditions and its release as attention to what it is found, caught, which is the content This is why any notice or attempted explanation or interpretation is anchored in a "system or expectations horizon of expectations" and what is found will be "a confirmative or corrective response" (Popper, 1975b, p. 314-315). However, it is noteworthy that the "horizon of expectations" differs by being more or less conscious, but also for their content, that is, for what is the search object. In this case, the searched content may or may not conform to the "horizon of expectations", being the subject investigator, either in one case as in the other, dealing properly, which it is provided by the theoretical and methodological conditions of survey. However, if the researcher does not have a theoretical and methodological framework to enable it to understand beyond your expectations, you can not do what Popper calls "reconstruct, or rebuild, our whole horizon of expectations; that is, we may have to correct our expectations and fit them together, again, in something like a coherent whole " (1975b, p. 317), which means being able to review the selection process, planning, launch, gathering networks, as well as the treatment given to what was collected. Unable to walk this path, the researcher will be stuck to their

ways of understanding established, facing difficulty to criticize about yourself, about the theory they had, getting stuck to their preconceptions.

To this process of "reconstruct, rebuild" we could associate: the denial of theorizing practices avaricious and closed, convinced of their validity, and reaffirm the theories that seek space for the happening of critical reflexivity on its own production and pretensions of social knowledge, as taught in the Ball (2011); difficulties concerning both the explanation of the philosophical and epistemological contributions that support the analysis as consistency in the construction and placement of the educational field problems and the critical exercise, as reminds us Gatti (2012); and the visible "withdrawal from theory" not only in education and educational policies, but also in the social practices, economic and political and overvaluation of the "epistemology of practice," according to Moraes (2003, 2009), Bhaskar (1993) and Shiroma (2003).

Therefore, it seems pertinent to continue in the field of Popperian metaphors and signal the "searchlight theory", that is, that is the theory that helps us design what to do, how to do, where to go, where to have an interest, what to watch, what to do with the perceived (as much as it is in accordance with the expectations when it explodes), because "shed light" or "light", as it might be supposed as a searchlight function it is not limited to find the "ultimate truth" but have "critical attitude" As tells Popper (1975b, p. 319):

The new attitude I have in mind is the critical attitude. Instead of a dogmatic transmission of doctrine (in which all the interest lies in preserving the authentic tradition), we find a critical discussion of the doctrine. Some people start to ask questions about them; doubt the veracity of the doctrine; of its truth.

In this universe, we ponder: where does it live the conditions for criticism? To Ball (2011), they reside in the potential of the theory as "vehicle to think differently", "arena to audacious hypotheses and provocative analysis"; in the discussion of questions such as "How do we put our research problems? What is an issue that can certainly be qualified as research in education? What is our focus?" Or, as Gatti calls our attention (2012, p. 20), the recognition that the "theory on one hand, allows the development of already produced knowledge and on the other hand, it is support for the search of new knowledge" but we must consider that they are historical and therefore need to go through the "epistemological riddle of philosophical reflection and knowledge" to avoid the mere

erudition, as Paviani warns us (2013, p. 45-49) ; in the replacement of the theory in position to its retreat, as pointed out by Moraes (2009) and Duayer and Morales (1998), in an attempt to avoid pedagogism hindering research in the area, in view of extrapolating the empirical phenomenon or the immediacy of the event.

That way, we are invited, facing the search action, to clarify the assumptions that underpin what we propose and qualify as knowledge production, that is, the theoretical and methodological assumptions of research. When claiming for such assumptions, we are seeking the epistemological foundations that anchor the educational research.

In this context, it becomes relevant studies developed by Tello (2012a; 2012b; 2013), called Focusing the epistemologies of educational policy, which have pointed out, on one hand, that the act of searching is anchored in the worldview of the researcher and certain epistemological concepts, and on the other, that such references are not always clarified. The no clarification of such references has revealed the epistemological and methodological weaknesses of knowledge production in the educational policy field, giving the researchers the scan task in the way they conduct and develop their researches. So, Tello (2012a, p. 283) states that "the study of epistemological focus of education policy focuses on meta-analysis of field research process, that is, how it plans, designs and develops investigations in educational policy by the subject investigating", and it is necessary the explanation of the place where the researcher positions and the prospect of which performs its analysis. In this direction, Tello and Mainardes (2012, p. 5) point out that no explanation by the investigator from the place where the researcher speaks theoretically, lead to the "development of theoretical investigations with little consistency in their analysis and results." In this context, to develop theoretically consistent and relevant researches socially may be one of the greatest challenges of knowledge production in the field of educational policy, by relying on the critical element in the production of knowledge of the field. Thus, the theoretical inconsistency contributes to the status quo maintenance of researches both in the field of educational policy (theoretical field) 1 as the educational policies (management field, decision and policy action) since the production in the first would consist of disjointed handling concepts and theories and the second would be reduced to the description of phenomena. These findings come out to the elements that seek to score throughout this text about the importance and role of theory in researches on policy and educational policies.

Final considerations

An interim balance of what we presented in this essay leads us to suggest and say you do not do research in educational policy seriously without the strong presence of the theory. In this regard, we joined the reflections of Ball (2011), Moraes (2009), Shiroma (2003), Tello (2012b) and Popper (1975a) and: agree with Ball (2011, p. 92) When he defends the position that the absence of theory becomes an obstacle "to critical and creative thinking of the researcher"; we reinforce the criticism of Moraes (2009, p. 31) when complained that the route of the "epistemology of practice" ends up producing a conception of formation guided by "instrumental utility"; we emphasize the criticism of Shiroma (2003, p. 71) when he states that the withdrawal from theory produces a visible phenomenon "of managerialism penetration in education," a "teacher desintellectualization" and a "depoliticization of its formation"; we give reason to Tello (2012b) when he argues that the act of researching needs to be anchored and certain epistemological concepts and that these need to be clarified; and finally, we agree with Popper (1975a) when he says that "theories are networks" and we must "make the meshes of increasingly narrow network" to capture the real.

It is not possible and it is visibly impoverishing to believe you can do research in educational policy without the strong presence of theory. The sensory experience focused on itself ends up producing a poor view of the world and unable to inquire about herself. As alerts us Moraes (2009, p. 47), "the inescapable limits of tacit knowledge, the know-how of learning to learn" cannot overcome the everyday mystification often producing "false or misleading categories of themselves". Disqualification of knowledge historically produced and the retreat of the theory in the production of researches in educational policy end up producing a relativistic and skeptical view of the world, clearly detrimental to the advancement of social changes as necessary in times of crisis.

Moraes is right (2009, p. 47) when he says "the most sophisticated forms of knowledge and theoretical extension are the ones which allow the expansion of the scope of human praxis, enabling a deepening of everyday ontology." You cannot produce a "transformative praxis" and an expanded understanding of the practice without a theoretical mediation that enables "uncover", "unveiling", "defog" the structures of the educational experiences of the everyday world. Giving up this understanding means naturalize and perpetuate the very structures of everyday experiences, often unfair, authoritarian and impoverishing.

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