

Book review

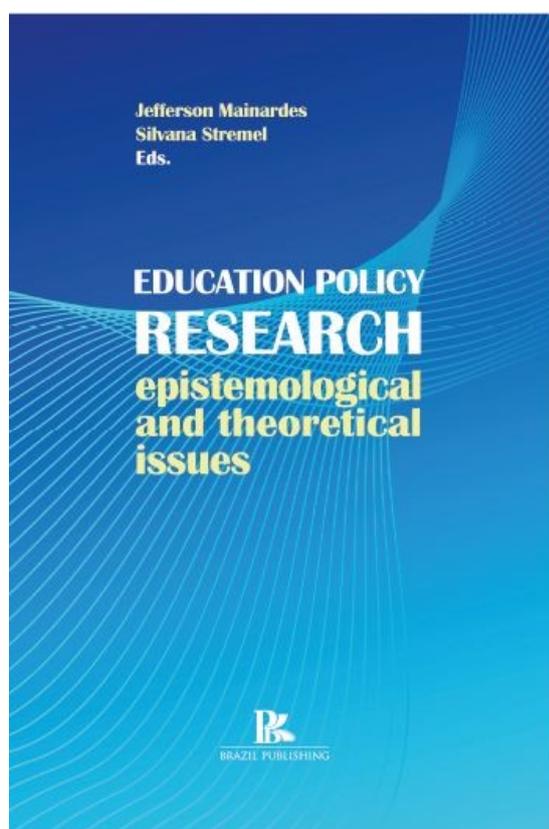
Mainardes, J., & Stremel, S. (2020). Education Policy research: epistemological and theoretical issues. Curitiba: Brazil Publishing. 270 p.

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The book *Education Policy research: epistemological and theoretical issues*, organized by Jefferson Mainardes and Silvana Stremel, has nine chapters, which can be divided into four distinct themes: a) Theoretical texts on Education Policy epistemologies (Chapters 1 and 2); b) Texts that support the theory and practice of meta-research in Education Policy (Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6); c) A study on the constitution of the academic field of Education Policy in Brazil (Chapter 7); and d) Studies and reflections on the training of researchers for the field of Education Policy (Chapters 8 and 9).

The chapters are the result of research that has been carried out within the scope of the *Red de Estudios Teóricos y Epistemológicas en Educación Educacional (ReLePe)*¹, to which the authors are linked. The main objective of the book is to make ReLePe's studies available, in English, a fact that may

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¹ See: www.relepe.org.

lead to a greater internationalization of the referred research network created in 2010. The creation of this research network was led by professors Cesar Tello (Argentina) and Jefferson Mainardes (Brazil), based on the observation that, in Latin America, there were a lot of research and publications on Education Policies, but few studies on the theoretical- epistemological research in Education Policies; in other words, on the theoretical foundations that have been used by researchers in the field.

Several contributions from researchers linked to ReLePe have been recognized in the field of Education Policy, mainly from publications that address the Epistemologies of Education Policy Approach (EEPA) and meta-research (Tello, 2012; Tello & Mainardes; 2015b; Mainardes & Tello, 2016; Mainardes, 2018c), the objects of study of Education Policy (Tello, 2015; Mainardes, 2018b; Souza, 2016); debates about pluralism as an epistemological perspective (Tello & Mainardes, 2012, 2015a; Mainardes, 2018a); Education Policy teaching (Flach & Masson, 2014; Stremel & Mainardes, 2015; Giovine, 2016; Mainardes, Stremel, & Rosa, 2017; Más Rocha, Lizzio, & Giménez, 2017; Moreira & Iulianelli, 2017; Guimarães-Iosif, Limeira, & Santos, 2018; Mendes, 2018; Rosa & Trojan, 2019); training of researchers for the field of Education Policy (Gorostiaga, 2017; Mainardes & Stremel, 2019); constitution of the academic field of Education Policy in Latin America (Garcias Franco, 2014; Stremel, 2016, 2017; Stremel & Mainardes, 2016, 2018), among other topics. In general, the book intends to indicate that there is a Latin American thought on epistemologies of Education Policy that deserves to be discussed in the international scenario of research on Education Policies.

The first two chapters of the book are intended to present basic concepts of EEPA and the levels of approach and abstraction. In Chapter 1, César Tello presents the three elements of the focus of the EEPA: epistemological perspective, epistemological positioning and epistemological approach. The author explains that these concepts can be used by the researcher him/herself, as an exercise of reflexivity and epistemological surveillance (Bachelard, Bourdieu), as well as to carry out the meta-research in Education Policy - the analysis of field research (theses, dissertations, papers, research reports, etc.).

Chapter 2, written by Jefferson Mainardes and César Tello, characterizes the three levels of approach/abstraction that can be identified in research in the field of Education Policy: description, analysis and comprehension. It is a chapter that presents highly relevant contributions to the understanding of knowledge production in the field of Education Policy, as the researcher in the field will find subsidies to develop research at the level of understanding, indicated as the highest level of production. The main characteristic of comprehension studies is to present relevant syntheses on a given theme, in order to serve as a basis for other studies. The authors state that “[...] such studies are essential for strengthening the field, as they allow advances in knowledge about education policy” (Mainardes & Tello, 2020, p. 60). They also state that education policy research requires “[...] more studies at this level to constitute itself as a field that allows an understanding of the increasingly complex phenomena of political, social and educational reality” (Mainardes & Tello, 2020, p. 64).

The second section of the book is dedicated to the theory and practice of meta-research in Education Policy (Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6). In Chapter 3, Jefferson Mainardes defines meta-research (research of the research) and presents a series of topics that can be used in conducting research of this nature. Meta-research may involve the identification of the elements of the EEPA, the scope of the study (global, national, regional, local), the methodologies employed, the levels of approach/abstraction (description, analysis, understanding), the level of coherence between the elements of the research (problem, research questions, objectives, methodology, analyzes, results and conclusions), among others. The meta-research proposal presented by Mainardes makes it

clear that it is a heuristic proposal, which can be expanded according to the goals of the meta-research and the nature of the texts that will integrate the corpus.

Chapters 4 and 5 present data on a research carried out by the author, which involved the systematic analysis of 140 Education Policy papers, written by Brazilian researchers, published in Brazilian journals. There are several relevant contributions in these two chapters. A special highlight is the demonstration that a significant part (65.8%) of the analyzed papers is based on the combined theorizing strategy (McLennan, 1996). This fact leads the author to conclude that there is a tendency to use what he calls “epistemological pluralism”, that is, the composition of a theoretical framework formed by contributions from different theories and authors, sometimes from different epistemological matrices.² In general, they are chapters that work in conjunction with the theoretical and practical issues of meta-research, as well as the implications of these studies for understanding research in the field of Education Policy and reflecting strategies for the continuous strengthening of research in this field.

Chapter 6, written by Laélia Portela Moreira, presents an analysis of doctoral dissertations on the University for All Program (*Programa Universidade para Todos* - PROUNI) in Brazilian Graduate Programs in the area of Education, from 2007 to 2017. The author’s ideas are based on EEPA, as well as on other contributions in the field of public policy and Education Policy. The Chapter presents a mapping of the main themes and foundations of the doctoral dissertations, systematizes the approaches privileged by the authors, the types of theorization and the levels of abstraction achieved. The results reveal a wide range of approaches and themes, the low use of literature and models in the field of Education Policy and, from the point of view of abstraction levels, the predominance of descriptive and analytical studies, although the existence of comprehension studies is registered in a smaller number.

Chapter 7, written by Silvana Stremel and Jefferson Mainardes, presents a historical analysis of the constitution of the field of Education Policy in Brazil. It is a comprehensive study and theoretically based on Pierre Bourdieu’s theory and authors that support the analysis of the institutionalization of academic fields.

Chapters 8 and 9 address an issue that is still little explored in the literature: the training of researchers for the field of Education Policy. Silvana Stremel and Jefferson Mainardes present the main results of an exploratory study on the training of researchers in the field of Education Policy. The research was carried out through an online questionnaire answered by 108 PhD graduates, from lines of research related to Education Policy, from Graduate Programs in Education. Data analysis is based on aspects of Basil Bernstein’s theory. The text also discusses implications and challenges for the process of training Education Policy researchers.

In Chapter 9, Jorge Gorostiaga presents considerations about Education Policy as a theoretical field, the current situation of research in Education Policy in Latin America and presents indications about the desirability of moving towards a possible training model. The author points out that the field of research in education in Latin America, including Education Policy, has had a substantial expansion over the last three decades. Gorostiaga advocates that a good basic training for the researcher in Education Policy includes: knowledge of the great strands and the more general debates of epistemological, theoretical and methodological type within the Social Sciences; mastery of tools to face the analysis of education policies from a historical perspective and within the framework of national and global social, economic and political processes; stimulus to a high degree of self-reflexivity about epistemological and theoretical options (epistemological

² The issue of pluralism as an epistemology is complex and has been one of the issues discussed in ReLePe. On the subject, see Tello and Mainardes (2012, 2015a, 2015b) and Mainardes (2017, 2018a).

surveillance); the active participation, since undergraduate studies, in a research program that allows the student to observe the application of specific theoretical and methodological research tools, as well as the real development of a scientific knowledge production process. The author also mentions the importance of the Research Group and taking into account a number of ethical issues involved in the research process.

From an epistemological point of view, research is based on pluralism, with the use of theories (Bourdieu, Bernstein, among others) and relevant concepts from recognized authors to compose the theoretical-epistemological references. In general, the combinations are successful and make sense as an epistemological foundation.

Finally, we can say that it is a book relevant to the field of Education Policy. As for the strengths of the book, we highlight the following aspects: a) the book addresses innovative aspects and still little explored, including in the English language literature; b) there are a number of original ideas, such as the elements of EEPA, meta-research, levels of approach and abstraction; and c) the texts are based on research of a theoretical or empirical nature and there is a concern to explain the theories that support the studies. For these reasons, we believe that the book will contribute significantly to Education Policy researchers, as well as to the internationalization and expansion process of ReLePe.

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Mainardes, J., & Stremel, S. (2020). Education Policy research: epistemological and theoretical issues

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