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Presentation:
Policy building and generation
of knowledge in education

**Policy Building and Generation of
Knowledge in Education**

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Presentación: Construcción de políticas y generación de conocimiento en educación

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Guest Editor

Revista de Educación reaches its 400th issue, 82 years after its creation and 71 years after the adoption of its current name. Indeed, the first issue of *Revista Nacional de Educación*, the predecessor of the current journal, appeared in January 1941. It was born in a post-war environment, with an explicitly Falangist militancy and a strong ideological and indoctrinating content at the service of “patriotic reconstruction”. Eleven years later, in January 1952, the first issue of *Revista de Educación* was published. This journal was a continuation of its predecessor but with a new name and a more open and expressly educational ideological orientation, although still with very different characteristics and approaches to those of today. After a long journey, it reached its 300th issue in 1993, which later led to the publication of a special issue in 1996 commemorating the first three hundred issues. In its presentation, as the director of the journal between 1989 and 1996, I wrote some brief historical notes on the journal's trajectory over those 52 years, to which I refer interested readers (Tiana, 1996).

We have now reached issue 400, another very special number. The director and editors of *Revista de Educación* have thought it appropriate to devote this issue to a monographic theme that involves a reflection, among other things, on the role that scientific journals can play in today's world. A wise decision, in my opinion. Whereas in the commemoration of the 300th issue it was decided to make a systematic review of the journal, from its origin up to that point, in order to have a good documentary

base in times when digitisation was less advanced, it is now very appropriate to focus on the role of the journal and its impact on the construction of public education policies. Such is the genesis of this monographic issue, to which I was kindly offered to collaborate as a guest editor. In addition to the intellectual interest I have in the subject (whose conception and formulation we defined together), I must admit that being the only person to have the opportunity to present two issues with such round numbers was an additional incentive for me to accept the offer.

Thus, readers have before them a monographic issue entitled “Policy construction and knowledge generation in education”. The choice of this theme is also related to the contribution that *Revista de Educación* has been making to Spanish education throughout its history, although a special emphasis is placed on the most recent years.

On the one hand, the journal has played a prominent role in the generation of knowledge in the field of education and in the dissemination of the knowledge produced, adapting its characteristics to the different historical situations it has experienced. Particularly since the 1980s, it has been analysing issues of interest and current affairs in the field of education, having contributed to the introduction of international ideas, movements and trends in Spain, always from an analytical and critical perspective. In addition, it has contributed to opening up the Spanish educational scene to the world, both in terms of the subjects dealt with and the contributors it has brought on board. The culmination of these approaches came with the inclusion of the journal in the main international databases and with the recognition of its quality indicators, which continues to this day.

On the other hand, the journal has served as a support for the analysis and critique of the main educational policies developed in Spain and in other countries. It has contributed pedagogical studies, but also sociological, psychological, political and economic studies, among others, adopting a multidisciplinary approach. Many of these studies have applied comparative approaches, which have contributed to a proper understanding and assessment of the Spanish situation in its specificity as well as in its international dimension.

Yet, the theme of this issue goes beyond this vision, which focuses on the journal itself. While it is true that the articles published over the years have reflected the main trends in the generation of knowledge in the field of education, they have not been confined exclusively to the academic

sphere, however rigorous their approaches and demands may have been from this point of view. Given the journal's ties with the successive ministries responsible for education, it has also paid special attention to the educational policies that have been developed over time, both Spanish and international. It is not my intention here to provide a detailed review of the relevance of the issues addressed from this perspective, as it is sufficient to consult the list of such issues to see for oneself. Consequently, it can be said that there is a continuous interaction between the generation of knowledge and the construction and analysis of public policies in the field of education, which the history of the journal clearly illustrates.

In order to address the many facets of the proposed theme, this issue includes a total of nine articles dealing with a variety of topics. Although each of the authors has chosen the approach that seemed most appropriate, the nine articles can be grouped into three main categories.

The first category includes four articles focusing on the contribution that knowledge in education can make to the construction of educational policies and, more specifically, to what has come to be known as evidence-based policymaking. Indeed, three of them include this term in their titles. The use of this term also makes it possible to insert them unreservedly into the trend that has been in force for more than a decade, which advocates the need for policy decisions to be made on the basis of the best available evidence in order to avoid mistakes or improvisations. This trend is based on the studies developed by the OECD in the 1990s on the role of educational research and its contribution to policymaking, which were taken up more strongly in the first decade of the 21st century. As stated in a famous and influential report entitled *Evidence in Education* (OECD, 2007), we must consider what constitutes evidence in this field, what specific contribution educational research can make to it, how knowledge can be used for the construction of sound educational policies, and how the dysfunctions and problems detected by countries in this area can be addressed. According to the proposal of the specialists involved in the report, the objective is to promote *evidence-informed policy research*. That is broadly what the first four articles discuss.

Francesc Pedró's article addresses the difficulties of incorporating international comparative evidence in educational policymaking. A great researcher and expert in the field of comparative education policies and well acquainted with the actions developed by the OECD and UNESCO, where he has been working for two decades, Pedró's extensive interna-

tional experience serves as the basis for his reflections. The core of his reflections lies in the paradox that, despite the growing amount of international comparative evidence, individual countries' educational performance is not improving significantly. The contributions made by studies such as PISA and the political recommendations to which they have given rise do not seem to be producing the expected improvements.

According to Pedró, there are three reasons that could explain this paradox. Firstly, there is the perverse (not simply complicated) nature of educational problems, which involve several actors and have uncertain and non-linear connections between their policy variables. Secondly, there are communication gaps and barriers between researchers and knowledge generators, on the one hand, and policymakers, on the other hand. The latter also lack the training to properly understand the scope of such evidence. Thirdly, there is an evidence implementation gap, as the success of certain initiatives is not only explained by their own merits, but also by how they are implemented, which has to do with the expectations placed on them, the existing governance contexts, the collaboration of the different actors in the policy-making process, and the vicissitudes of the political cycle.

He concludes by stressing that comparative studies can only be seen as a source of information and not as the basis for technocratic prescriptions, which are nothing more than wishful thinking. In order to improve the influence that knowledge and evidence can exert, he argues that education policy researchers should become more familiar with the theoretical and conceptual richness of public policy studies in general.

The article by Manuel Fernández Navas and Ana Yara Postigo Fuentes also explores this line of thinking, although their approach is more focused on the analysis of the theoretical foundations and the specifics of evidence-based education. They link the relevance given to evidence-based education with the expansion of what Daniel Innerarity calls the *dataism* present in our complex societies, based on the claim to find simple solutions to problems that must necessarily be complex. They locate the founding event of evidence-based teaching in a conference by David Hargreaves in 1996, in which he called for more research-based teaching, which had great impact and dissemination. From then on, the idea spread, not without difficulties and contradictions.

Both authors believe that the main problem underlying this trend lies in the epistemological problems it raises, as well as in the reductionisms

it is forced to accept in order to progress. In their study, they pay special attention to the paradigm war that took place in educational research at the end of the 20th century. Indeed, their subsequent analysis of the reductionisms proposed by Wrigley is inserted in this perspective. For the authors, these reductionisms (experimental, psychological, social class, efficacy and bell jar), which serve as the backbone of their analysis, pose abusive simplifications that feed the delusion of finding adequate (simple) solutions to complex problems. Hence the fundamental criticism to be made of the evidentialist tendency, to which they devote a large part of their article.

The problem, however, is not limited to the adoption of abusive reductionism, but also has to do with the resurgence of a technocratic paradigm, whereby education should be considered merely as a technical matter, thus detaching it from the intentions, objectives and purposes that give it meaning, an approach that seemed to have been superseded. The conclusion they draw from these analyses is that underneath the proposal for evidence-based education lies, rather than a concern for improving education, an effort to construct narratives that support the educational policies adopted. They argue that education and research should be understood as complex processes and not simply as technical issues based on the analysis of quantitative data.

There is no doubt that the development of major international assessment programmes, most notably the PISA project, has given a strong impetus to this idea of making more and better use of the evidence that is available or can be built up. The above-mentioned OECD study found that the increasing attention paid by countries to the assessment of educational outcomes has been a powerful factor in re-launching a trend that barely got off the ground twenty years ago. It is therefore worth looking again at the international organisations that have promoted such massive surveys (such as the OECD) or are using them to drive their education policies (such as the European Union).

The article by Nóra Révai, Jordan Hill and José Manuel Torres presents and discusses some results of a study recently carried out by the *Centre for Educational Research and Innovation* (CERI) of the OECD, to which they belong. The project, called *Strengthening the Impact of Education Research*, follows the path of those mentioned above, developed by the same organisation in the 1990s and in 2007. It is a study based on a survey answered in 2021 by ministerial representatives from 37 educa-

tion systems in 29 countries and subsequently supplemented by semi-structured interviews with representatives from six of these countries. The purpose of the article is to identify some of the issues that facilitate the use of research in education policy and teaching practice, as well as the main features of recent research output. As can be easily seen, the authors address an issue that is of great interest when it comes to promoting evidence-based policymaking, since research is considered to be one of the main sources of evidence.

The article presents the data obtained in relation to three main aspects: 1) who are the main actors in the mobilisation of research, that is, who facilitates its use; 2) what does this mobilisation consist of, or in other words, what are the mechanisms applied to promote its use; 3) what are the barriers that hinder the mobilisation and use of research. The survey conducted, with questions of various types and formats, attempts to explore these issues, along with some others that are not the subject of this paper.

The conclusions obtained are certainly interesting. Firstly, it is apparent that the education systems differ notably in the number and nature of the actors who promote the use of research. In contrast to the traditional distinction between researchers, policymakers and educational practitioners, there are now other actors such as research funders, textbook publishers, technology companies, think tanks, networks of researchers and practitioners, the media and students, who have a greater or lesser presence and activity, depending on the case. In addition, in many countries, there are intermediary agencies and other similar organisations. The same can be said about the multiplicity, diversity and variable presence of mechanisms to promote the mobilisation and use of research. While there are some fairly widespread instruments, such as the funding of specific and targeted research programmes, there is a wide dispersion among the ten main mechanisms identified and their relative presence in different education systems. The article also highlights the existence of significant and varied barriers to such mobilisation. Overall, the article points to the excessive presence of actors and mechanisms based on a linear conception of such mobilisation, as opposed to others that should be present on the basis of relational or systemic models. Finally, it concludes with the need to develop the latter models in order to achieve a more effective use of the results of the research.

The article by Javier Valle and Lucía Sánchez-Urán widens the focus to deal with the activities developed not only by the OECD but also by

UNESCO and the European Union. Their central thesis, which serves as the backbone of their paper, is that international organisations have been launching a set of ideas, concepts and approaches to education, which spread rapidly in this globalised world, with the real or symbolic support of the organisations themselves, to the point of becoming trends that produce a notable impact in the different countries that adopt them. In this global context, international organisations play a decisive role, exercising a soft power that is as evident as it is influential, which is why it is worth taking a look at the type of action they promote.

In order to show how international organisations exert this influence, two examples of great relevance today are analysed. The first one concerns the concept of lifelong learning, whose main promoter was UNESCO, half a century ago, under the term *lifelong education*, and which would later be replicated and expanded by the OECD and the European Union, becoming highly relevant in the last twenty years. The second example refers to the discourse of evidence-based education policy, which fits neatly into the theme of this issue. While earlier we spoke of how the work of CERI-OECD contributed to the development of this discourse, Valle and Sánchez-Urán describe the contribution made by UNESCO and the European Union.

The analysis carried out by the authors on the construction and dissemination of this discourse is based on the study of the programmes and documents produced by these organisations, which corroborates their theses. They also provide an analysis of the main systems of indicators used in the implementation of this discourse, especially the publications *Education at a Glance* (OECD) and *Education and Training Monitor* (European Union). From this, they draw some conclusions which are worth comparing with those provided by the other three papers included in this category of the theme addressed in the issue. On the one hand, they insist on the predominance of the use of quantitative data and of data referring to learning outcomes, which is in line with the reflection on *dataism* mentioned above. In this respect, they suggest the need to use other qualitative indicators, with explanatory potential, referring to processes and contexts. On the other hand, the authors underline the strong economic component of these sets of indicators, which, due to the way they are defined, also contribute to constructing the reality that they claim only to describe. Finally, they argue for the need to combine this type of “evidence” with other “micro” information, more comprehen-

sive and capable of offering more complete and complex information to support decision-making and the construction of educational policies.

The second category covered in this issue includes three articles focusing on the role of scientific journals as a vehicle for the dissemination of knowledge about education and, by extension, their role in the construction of such knowledge. Although two of them deal with matters related to *Revista de Educación* itself, this group of papers does not focus solely on it. The articles in this category look at other Spanish and Portuguese journals, with the aim of broadening the field of analysis.

The article by Marta Ruiz Corbella, Ernesto López Gómez, Arturo Galán González and Consuelo Vélaz de Medrano traces the evolution of several Spanish scientific journals on education over a decade (2011-2020). The authors, all of them involved at some point in the editing of these journals, are aware of the role they play today as the main channel of communication of research, hence their interest in studying them. They argue convincingly that two complementary phenomena, which have been taking place since the 1980s, are involved in explaining this decisive role. On the one hand, they analyse how Spanish science policy has been configured and constructed, one of the central components of which has been the promotion of the scientific production of our institutions and researchers. In this regard, they particularly highlight the work carried out recently by the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT in Spanish), created in 2001, which has strongly supported the professionalisation and internationalisation of Spanish scientific journals. On the other hand, they underline the driving role played in this process by the system for evaluating the research activity of university teaching staff, to the extent that six-year research periods have become an essential tool for the professional development of scholars. Given that the six-year periods and the accreditation systems for teaching staff attach decisive importance to scientific papers and the publications in which they appear, it is only logical that journals have become highly relevant, notwithstanding the problems that this predominant position may cause.

The article reviews the evolution of the eight journals included exclusively in the *Education* category of the *Scopus* ranking (as it includes a greater number of Spanish journals than the *World of Science* database) during the decade 2011-2020, leaving aside those included in two or more categories (59 journals). Seven of them are published by Spanish universities and the eighth journal is *Revista de Educación*. Altogether,

they published 2340 articles in the above-mentioned decade. Their analysis has provided a full picture of the evolution of these journals.

The authors conclude that a clear positive trend can be observed over these ten years in terms of impact and indexing, which is particularly evident for *Educación XXI* and *Revista de Educación*. The eight journals analysed have generally improved their position in the ranking, with a predominant presence in the second quartile (Q2). The analysis goes into greater detail on the language used, the presence of non-Spanish authors (mostly Latin American) and the keywords used in the articles published. Overall, the paper paints a positive picture, although there are still some critical points that will require attention in the coming years.

The article by Ramón López Martín is a good example of how a scientific journal can serve as a source for reconstructing relevant aspects of education in the past. In this case, he studies how school practices and pedagogical styles in Spain in the 20th century are reflected in *Revista de Educación*. The article's theoretical framework focuses on the study of schools as a social space that is constructed with a culture of its own. In accordance with this perspective, special attention is paid to the so-called *school culture*, insofar as it allows a comprehensive look inside the school institution, as many researchers have been calling for. In this sense, school culture includes three key elements, namely theories (or accounts of pedagogical ideals and discourses, resulting from the reflection of experts), rules (or regulations and administrative prescriptions promoted by system managers) and school practices developed by teachers. The interaction of these three elements constructs the school culture that must be studied.

From this theoretical framework, the author turns to *Revista de Educación* as an exceptional witness of Spanish education in the second half of the 20th century, which allows him to re-read the models of school practices and pedagogical styles developed in that time and context. In addition, he insists on the double role that this journal has played: on the one hand, it has contributed to the generation of knowledge related to the aforementioned triple dimension of school culture; on the other hand, it has captured the evolution of these aspects during the period in question. Given the breadth that would be required to analyse the evolution of all the elements of school culture, the author has selected school practices and pedagogical styles as being of special interest, leaving aside on this occasion the analysis of discourse and rules.

The article distinguishes three periods, each of which has unique characteristics that allow them to be considered as units of analysis. The first period corresponds to the *post-war school*, which is characterised by a nationalist and Catholic orientation that has led to it being referred to as *national-Catholic*. The author underlines the explicit desire to achieve a Christian, patriotic and intellectual education for children, placing schools at the service of religion and the nation. Numerous references in *Revista Nacional de Educación* support this objective, which overrides the need to guide teaching practice. The absence of questionnaires and school programmes meant that encyclopaedias and school textbooks were the fundamental reference point for school practice in this first period. The second period, one of *technocratic modernisation*, began as the journal changed its name and its focus. The openness experienced, albeit timid, allowed the introduction of pedagogical criteria into the school environment, which the article analyses in detail. For example, the review does a good service to the understanding and dissemination of the 1953 questionnaires, which were intended to serve as a guide for a new approach to school activity. The 1960s marked a new step forward, with the publication of new questionnaires in 1965, which led to an array of modern teaching tools, which are also dealt with in several issues of the journal. A few years later, the Spanish General Education Act of 1970 marked the beginning of a new era which saw the culmination of the techno-bureaucratic nature of pedagogy. Finally, the third period corresponds to the *democratic school*, in which education (“of all and for all”) is understood as an instrument at the service of democratic coexistence. Modernisation reaches *Revista de Educación*, which takes a leap in quality and reflects the international efforts that are taking place to build a modern school capable of responding to new challenges. The new education law passed in 1990 (LOGSE in Spanish) symbolises this change, which became a reality with the implementation of the law, the stage at which the author concludes his research.

The third article in this second category, written by Álvaro Nieto Ratero, Pedro Seguro Romero and Evangelina Bonifácio is linked to the previous two. It is connected with the article by Ruiz Corbella, López Gómez, Galán González and Vélaz de Medrano in that it adopts the same time period for the analysis and focuses on journals included in one of the most renowned quality indexes (again *Scopus*), although this time it deals with Portuguese journals. It also connects with the article by López

Martín in that it deals with the treatment of a specific issue in these journals, this time relating to the construction of teacher training policies. It is precisely the selection of this topic that allows us to link up with the central theme of the issue, relating to the generation of knowledge and the construction of educational policies.

The article begins by presenting the main changes that have taken place in the first two decades of the 21st century with regard to initial and in-service teacher training in Portugal. The regulations published in the form of decree-laws in 2001, 2007 and 2014 have been defining and redefining the characteristics of the Portuguese teacher training system. The presentation of this system serves as a reference for the study of the articles published in relation to teacher training and professional development policies. To carry out the analysis, the authors have selected the only two Portuguese education journals included in *Scopus* (*Revista Portuguesa de Educação* and *Revista Lusófona de Educação*). In the years under consideration (2011-2021) the former published 14 articles (out of a total of 253) on teacher education and development and the latter 32 (out of a total of 419). Overall, 46 articles were published on these topics, out of a total of 672 articles published in those years, representing a limited 6.8%. The authors carry out their analysis on the basis of these 46 articles.

A detailed study of the articles published in both journals leads to several conclusions. Firstly, the number of articles on the chosen topic is quite small. Their chronological appearance has been irregular, without there necessarily being a concentration at times of regulatory change (although some of them fall outside the period in question). On the other hand, the focus and subject matter of these articles is very varied, with no clear constants. The absence of monographic issues devoted to the chosen topic despite its relevance is also striking. All of this leads the authors to stress the need to involve more actors in this task of knowledge generation and to establish more relationships between them. Specifically, they conclude their article by stressing the need for greater involvement of practising teachers in the construction of teaching policies, despite the difficulties that this entails.

The third miscellaneous category of this monograph includes two articles that deal with two specific cases of educational policymaking. The two articles are very different from each other, but they are related in their desire to analyse the construction of public education policies in relevant fields.

The article by Guillermo Ruiz focuses on the construction of educational policies in a federal state, namely the Republic of Argentina. The central focus of his work lies in the effect produced by the educational reforms carried out in the first years of the 21st century, although his analysis goes back a little further in time when necessary. The conceptual framework that serves as the basis for the study is to be found in the analysis of the characteristics of federal states and their translation into the field of education. After analysing the fundamental features of federalism and characterising the Argentinean state as a federal model that can be called a coming-together model, he describes the distribution of responsibilities in the field of education between the federal state and the provincial jurisdictions. In his view, despite its unequivocally federal political and administrative definition, Argentina historically experienced a gradual process of centralisation, which also affected education. Subsequent decentralisation processes, of varying pace and scope, produced what he calls a dispersed diversification of the education system, one of the main (pernicious) effects of which is to call into question the effectiveness of the principle of equality between citizens and jurisdictions. The author devotes special attention to this central issue in his article.

In order to analyse the impact of recent education reforms, the author selects several issues, which can be grouped into two main topics. First, he analyses the changes introduced by the 2006 law in the academic structure of the education system. This reform introduced the possibility of choosing between two alternative durations of primary and secondary education (7+5 or 6+6), which were adopted almost equally by the different provincial jurisdictions. Alongside and closely linked to the variable duration of these educational stages is the difficulty in achieving the desired convergence of curricular policies. Despite the existence of common compulsory contents and common priority learning cores, the diversity of academic structures throughout the country made it difficult to implement the new curricula under equal conditions. To this, we must add the different rates of adoption of common State standards by provincial jurisdictions, which has introduced further inequalities.

While the analysis of academic structures and curricula shows the emergence of territorial inequalities as a result of the implementation of the 2006 education reform, the analysis of school coverage confirms this even more. Differences in educational coverage are studied from two points of view. On the one hand, from the perspective of coverage

in absolute terms, which shows the existence of a high level of coverage in the years of compulsory schooling. On the other hand, from the perspective of the relative weight of public and private education, which reveals notable differences between the different territories, with public schooling rates of over 85% in several provinces in the north-west and north-east coexisting with rates of almost 50% in the city of Buenos Aires. According to the author, the data confirm his thesis of a dispersed diversification, which compromises the achievement of effective equality in education. Correcting it would require a more active role of the federal State as a promoter and guarantor of the right to education.

The last article, by Inmaculada Sánchez Macías, Alice Semedo and Guadalupe García-Córdova, adopts a comparative approach to the educational policies implemented in three countries (Spain, Portugal and Mexico) in the field of heritage education. The authors carry out an analysis of the curricular regulations in force in each country, focusing on the similarities and differences found in their respective laws. In short, they develop a comparison of educational policies related to the curriculum.

The authors, all of whom are professors at universities in the aforementioned countries, begin their study by examining the curricular models in force in each country, describing the regulations that govern them and their characteristics. They then go on to analyse the curricula in force at the educational stage from 11 to 16 years of age, in accordance with national particularities. They explain their conception of heritage education, understood as a transversal subject that is linked to the concept of individual and social identity, related to the existing connection between heritage and society and aimed at strengthening citizenship. Heritage education is carried out through different school subjects, such as History and Geography, Art, Language, Philosophy, Religion, Music, and Civic Education, among others, although the situation differs from one country to another.

To carry out their analysis, they use a range of quantitative and qualitative tools and software, including document analysis and word co-occurrence, which help them to highlight similarities and asymmetries in heritage education. Among their conclusions, they highlight the relationship of their respective definitions with culture and art, the existence of explicit references to values and attitudes, and the diversity of concepts used and contents included. They conclude by pointing out the need to redefine established curricula, given their inadequacies, to extend the

concept of heritage used and to adapt heritage education to new methodologies and ICTs.

Overall, the issue reviews a number of issues related to the generation of knowledge in education and the construction of public education policies. We hope that the reader will find the selected articles of interest. Although they do not exhaust the subject, they do provide a set of suggestive and complementary perspectives.

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