

Contributions of poststructuralism to qualitative research in education

Dalton Gean Perovano

Secretaria de Estado da Segurança Pública do Paraná (Brasil)

Sônia Maria Chaves Haracemiv

Universidade Federal do Paraná (Brasil)

Abstract

The article demonstrates the relationship between post-structuralist theoretical perspectives and qualitative research in education, based on the discussion of its foundations. It brings philosophical contributions from Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger and theoretical insights from researchers such as Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe, with an interest in contemporary educational thought. We adopted a bibliographical research, which seeks to deal with scientific production based on the analysis of post-structuralist theoretical categories. We highlight the categories of person, language, discourse, power relations, and deconstructivism. The investigation shows that these theoretical categories, articulated with qualitative methodologies, allow the creation of discursive proposals for the research process, with new investigative horizons. We can infer that post-structuralist theories promote a break with the linear models present in structuralist methodologies.

Keywords: Post-structuralism. Qualitative research. Education research. Discourse theory.

Contribuições do pós-estruturalismo na pesquisa qualitativa em educação

Resumo

O artigo demonstra as relações entre perspectivas teóricas pós-estruturalistas e a pesquisa qualitativa em educação, a partir da discussão de seus fundamentos. Traz contribuições filosóficas a partir de Friedrich Nietzsche e Martin Heidegger e recortes teóricos de pesquisadores como Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Ernesto Laclau e Chantal Mouffe, com interesse no

pensamento educacional contemporâneo. Adotou-se a pesquisa bibliográfica como referência, a qual busca tratar da produção científica baseada na análise de categorias teóricas pós-estruturalistas. São destacadas as categorias de sujeito, linguagem, discurso, relações de poder e desconstrutivismo. A investigação demonstra que tais categorias teóricas, articuladas às metodologias qualitativas, permitem a criação de propostas discursivas para o processo de pesquisa, com novos horizontes investigativos. Pode-se inferir que as teorias pós-estruturalistas promovem um rompimento com os modelos lineares presentes nas metodologias estruturalistas.

Palavras-chave: Pós-estruturalismo. Pesquisa qualitativa. Pesquisas em educação. Teoria do discurso.

Aportes del postestructuralismo en la investigación cualitativa en educación

Resumen

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El artículo demuestra las relaciones entre perspectivas teóricas postestructuralistas y la investigación cualitativa en la educación, a partir de la discusión de sus fundamentos. Aporta contribuciones filosóficas de Friedrich Nietzsche y Martin Heidegger y recortes teóricos de investigadores como Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Ernesto Laclau y Chantal Mouffe, con interés en el pensamiento educativo contemporáneo. Fue adoptada la investigación bibliográfica, que busca abordar la producción científica a partir del análisis de categorías teóricas postestructuralistas. Se destacan las categorías de sujeto, lenguaje, discurso, relaciones de poder y deconstructivismo. La investigación muestra que estas categorías teóricas, articuladas con metodologías cualitativas, permiten la creación de propuestas discursivas para el proceso de investigación con nuevos horizontes investigativos. Se puede inferir que las teorías postestructuralistas promueven una ruptura con los modelos lineales presentes en las metodologías estructuralistas.

Palabras clave: Postestructuralismo. Pesquisa cualitativa. Pesquisas em educação. Teoría del discurso.

Introduction

The various poststructuralist theoretical perspectives and the qualitative approach have been highlighted and relevance, in addition to raising doubts about the internal and external validity of education research. They emerge as producers of meanings and act as interpretive filters in a vast network of meanings, from readings of the world or the phenomena under investigation, reframing education research.

The research intends to demonstrate the interrelationships of poststructuralism with qualitative research, which aims to understand, describe and create meanings for phenomena in their multiple contexts, differing from quantitative approaches of hypothetical-deductive bias. In this sense, we intend to outline some considerations of poststructuralism in research in the area of education, highlighting concepts and definitions as a way of understanding and interpreting research environments, people and contexts.

For these interpretative movements, we considered in this article the contributions of Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger and authors such as Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, among others. The complex networks of concepts that relate the orientations on poststructuralism and qualitative research in education necessarily go through the following terms and aspects: the fundamental conceptions of poststructuralism, the perception of curriculum policies and the discursive conceptions built in the research process.

In addition to the aforementioned topography, we highlighted the theoretical categories of discourse, individual, power relations, rhizome, demands and hegemony, culture and curriculum, and others, which may enhance the way a certain phenomenon is studied in education.

The position taken in this research follows three assumptions: poststructuralism corresponds to a movement formed by a complex of theories, not a collection of methodologies; the precaution of avoiding the illusory notion that such perspectives are limited to the occasional deconstruction of structures conceived by structuralism; and the statement that qualitative research is not a set of methods that present low rigor or scientific criteria.

To understand some of the poststructuralist assumptions, the present study carries out the approach based on several aspects of its conceptions – aware that such perspectives present more aggressive, radical, anarchic or even conservative positions of science –, with the intention of describing, understanding or conceiving reality as a subjective and social conception of education research.

It seeks to understand the assumptions that promoted the rupture and the bridges that link structuralism to poststructuralism, which will serve as starting points for the exercise of criticism.

The guiding question for the present investigation aims to know: How can certain poststructuralist theoretical categories contribute to education research, based on the guidelines, conceptions and methods of the qualitative research approach?

Classified as bibliographic, the research sought to treat scientific production according to the analysis of poststructuralist theoretical categories, with the approach on the individual, language, discourse, power relations and deconstructivism.

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In the characterization and exposition of the various poststructuralist perspectives and qualitative research, we adopted the type of descriptive study, which allows observing and representing how certain phenomena manifest themselves, the important properties of people, contexts, processes, and their times.

Qualitative focus on education research

Qualitative research in education still does not require investigations that adopt the various theoretical prisms of poststructuralism, since it allows philosophical responses in overcoming the structuralist movement, with the logic of the opposition and deconstruction of concepts considered central to these theories.

As an important aspect to be considered, Oliveira (2018, p. 28) understands “[...] poststructuralism as a theoretical perspective that makes it possible to oppose the idea of qualitative research as a representation of fixed

identities or a given context of reality [...]”. Given this situation, the conception that will be defended is that qualitative methods fluctuate in the analysis of phenomena to move away from closed constructs or preconceived identities.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2006, p. 32), qualitative research in sociology and anthropology “[...] was born from a concern to understand the other [...]”, which was the exotic other, in the same conceptual context of identity and difference discussed by Jacques Derrida.

This research focus uses approaches, methods and techniques from ethnomethodology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminism, rhizome, deconstructionism, ethnography, cultural studies based on surveys, observation, participatory research, collaborative research, among others.

In this sense, qualitative research methods try to capture the reality of a given phenomenon through representations with semiotic, narrative, phenomenological, content, and discursive analysis, among others.

In the qualitative research approach, the researcher is the one who determines the most important questions in the investigation, refines and answers them. In this approach, the process moves dynamically between the facts and their interpretation. The emphasis is not on measuring the variables involved in the phenomenon, but on understanding the phenomenon based on its terms or concepts, as it seeks the dispersion or expansion of its meanings.

As an advantage, there is the depth in the analysis of the data, the fluctuation, the inconstancy, the interpretative richness, and the contextualization of the environments, with the natural and holistic point of view. For Denzin and Lincoln, the qualitative approach consists of:

[...] a situated activity that positions the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative and material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world by making it a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and personal notes (Denzin; Lincoln, 2006, p. 3).

The direct source of data will be the natural environment in which the researcher acts, lives, and relates to dimensions that guarantee greater proximity to their research object and the contents investigated are understood in

their usual natural environment. For Flick (2009), qualitative research methods, such as ethnographic, observation, focus group, among others, must be adequate to what is studied.

Thus, in the process of data collection provided by the social environment, the researcher must seek to understand the behavior of the people who participate in certain environments, starting with the observation of the system and its activities, the norms that make up a given group, the social roles and the ecological contexts that comprise the culture itself.

The exercise of qualitative research, integrated with poststructuralist perspectives, allows in-depth discussions on the objects of educational study. Such objects can be studied and conceived from the criticism of the relations on the groups in conditions of social vulnerability, the lack of social representation, the oppression, and the exclusion of social groups, recognized as hegemonic in the exercise of relations of domination, among other examples.

In the writing style of qualitative research, based on poststructuralist theoretical perspectives, the possibility of changes in the traditional format of scientific writing is observed, with greater appeal and intellectual interest.

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In writing, poststructuralist perspectives are considered positions, in specific times and situations, in the composition and construction of a text, which can refer or express itself in a synchronous or diachronic way to multiple participating readers.

Poststructuralist perspectives for education research

Education has a special interest in areas of poststructuralist studies and knowledge, such as discourse theory, queer theory, cultural studies, rhizome, forms of control or repression, with the problematization and deconstruction of culturally produced knowledge and posited as authentic or true.

The conception of poststructuralism, according to Richardson (2018), has its origin in postmodernism, according to which,

[...] postmodernism suspects that all truth claims mask and serve the interests of a place, a culture, and a political struggle. [...] The postmodernist context of doubt, therefore, is equally suspicious of

all methods. No method has a privileged status. Poststructuralism links to language, subjectivity, social organization, and power. The centerpiece is language. Language does not reflect social reality, but produces meaning and creates social reality (Richardson, 2018, p. 547).

Poststructuralism is considered a movement of response of denial and claim to structuralism, designated by a group of thinkers, mainly French, who, influenced by Ferdinand Saussure's theory of language, applied concepts of linguistics to the structures of study of social and cultural phenomena. The relationships and methods applied to the structure of the works interfere with the reading and understanding of the text itself.

As a movement, poststructuralism distrusts structuralism as a system and method of interpretation and determines that a work must be conceived as a criticism of the individual's knowledge or reality. Concomitantly, it presents many similarities with structuralism, even if it pretends to depart from its principles, as the movement emerges from within.

According to Culler (1999), structuralism developed first in anthropology (Claude Lévi-Strauss) and then in literary and cultural studies (Roman Jakobson, Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette), psychoanalysis (Jacques Lacan), intellectual history (Michel Foucault) and Marxist theory (Louis Althusser).

According to Peters (2000), post-structuralism should not be understood as a theory or method, but as a movement of contradiction, opposition, or contestation. Nor should it be understood as a segment of theories and a denial of structuralism or a conception with arguments and narratives without scientific proof. It also aims to improve and contribute to the theories already built and consolidated.

For Martin Heidegger (1999), poststructuralism is considered a dissociated and decentralized movement of structures and uncritical systematic methods of structuralism. Based on the criticism of the structuralist, Derrida demonstrates

[...] the limit of the structural game, as a result of the essential link to the foundation that fixes the structure. Derrida [...] mentions that structures and their limitations are old, and structuralism consists of [...] just another chapter in this long history (Derrida, 2002, p. 45).

On the new conceptions that gave rise to the poststructuralist foundations, present in Nietzsche and Heidegger, Peters (2000, p. 2) mentions that poststructuralism is “[...] then, as a specific philosophical response to the supposed scientific status of structuralism, to its status as a great paradigm for the social sciences [...]”.

Thus, poststructuralism contributes to a complex and extensive network of ideas, concepts, conceptions, and theories, which enables many ways of exercising criticism and interpretations.

For Lopes (2013), it is no longer considered a movement or a common doctrine, because authors who work with this view understand it as a language game and can put in suspension the processes of signified. By characterizing poststructuralism in this way, there is a risk of underestimating the interpretive role of research phenomena.

According to Heidegger (1999, p. 15), poststructuralist hermeneutics encompasses the word, the text, the context, and the participating individual and is found in the conception of foundation, present in the book entitled “The Principle of Foundation”, which [...] establishes the principle formulated as *nihil est sine ratione*, which means: nothing is without foundation.”

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According to Heidegger (1999, p. 16), this principle aims to “[...] search for truth or existence, always pending, according to Leibniz, the verification of a reason that explains why something is in one way and not in another”.

Mendonça (2020, p. 122) points out that “[...] this was summarized by Heidegger in the formula: ‘nothing is without foundation’. Thus, the foundation, to be a foundation, depends on an external cause that justifies an existence or a truth.”

For Nietzsche, it is not necessary to start from the great scientific truths to make history, but a questioning of knowledge that increasingly tries to seize the condition of lives and the real. In this sense, Foucault teaches a way of making history, fundamentally occupied with a genealogy focused on the observation of bodies, for the apprehension of discontinuities as things lived and inscribed in this unique and irreducible place of individuals.

Poststructuralist are concerned with and interested in knowing how phenomena are constituted and constructed and, according to Dutra (2009), truth becomes a perspective contrary to an absolute hierarchy.

However, Heidegger (1991, p. 31) calls attention to a contextual thinking and that this act does not go in the opposite direction of logic in the defense of the illogical or "[...] that thinking against values is destroying or disregarding their importance."

Thinking differently, in a certain social context, according to Deleuze (1992, p. 56), "[...] is an important factor, and questioning and analyzing the different points of view about a certain situation is a way of understanding reality".

The poststructuralist look, modes of thought and interpretation allow the researcher to build knowledge based on the contestation of what is given or represented by the individual or the collective, in the movement that starts from the analysis of organic and microphysical realities.

For structuralism, it is not so much the content of the reading content, but how the elements are supportive of each other. The content and context of the messages are of less interest than the relationships given in this system of signs, that is, the literary work or the research.

Culler (1999), Barthes (1970), Lacan (1998) and Foucault (2011) recognize the inability to describe a coherent and complete meaningful system, since systems are always changing.

The passage from structuralism to poststructuralism is, in part, as Barthes (1970) states, a passage from the work to the text (Eagleton, 2009). The poem, or the novel, ceases to be a closed entity, equipped with defined meanings, to be the task of the critic to discover, in an irreducibly pluralistic endless game, of signifiers that can never be finally apprehended around a single center, in a single essence or signification.

In poststructuralism, according to Eagleton (2009), there is no clear division between criticism and creation, as both modes are understood in writing. In structuralism, it turned out that language became an obsessive concern of intellectuals. The author questions how people wrote in an industrial

society, in which discourse had degraded to a simple instrument of science, commerce, advertising or bureaucracy.

One of the great challenges of poststructuralist research is to take the text out of the common place, as a mere instrument of science or the knowledge industry. The scientific text becomes plural, seen in multiple dimensions, it becomes a network of meanings, of signifiers unable to be apprehended in a single center, but in several perspectives.

The foundation of the structure, according to Derrida (2002), is questioned from Nietzsche to Heidegger. Philosophers realized that the center is not a fixed/stationary space and that meanings are changeable within the theory itself. Regarding the first essays of poststructuralist writing, Foucault (2011) mentions that

Desire says: I did not want to have to enter this risky order of discourse; I did not want to have to deal with what is categorical and decisive; I would like it to be around me as a calm, deep, indefinitely open transparency [...]. And the institution answers: You have no reason to be afraid to start; we are all there to show you that discourse is in the order of laws [...] if it occurs to you to have any power, it is from us, only from us, that it comes (Foucault, 2011, p. 7).

To some extent, poststructuralism identifies with and expands aspects of structuralism and goes beyond its conceptions (Giddens, 1999).

In the explanation of certain phenomena, contexts, and policies, based on qualitative research methods, the various poststructuralist perspectives are admitted, based on discursive proposals, and elected according to the use of theoretical categories that interest education.

Poststructuralist theoretical categories and qualitative research

Five theoretical categories will be highlighted in the construction of poststructuralist thinking and reasoning in education: individual, language, political theory of discourse, deconstructivism and power relations.

The first category refers to the individual and, according to Peters (2000, p. 25), poststructuralist researchers still support structuralism, since “[...] this is constituted and governed by structures and systems, their philosophical constructions, such as the Cartesian-Kantian, the individual of existentialism, the Hegelian and phenomenological and the Marxist collective”.

The deconstruction of this perception, for Derrida (2003), requires the inversion of a structural logic or a certain social and cultural context. For the researcher, universal cultural structures correspond to the recognition of the existence of an entity or a universal individual contrary to poststructuralist perspectives. Thus, poststructuralism abandons the essentialist conception of the individual and the deconstruction of its perception centered on structural relations.

According to Lopes (2014, p. 12) “[...] the individual is the discursive precipitate of the articulations taken on undecidable ground, and the fullness of an identity is necessarily impossible due to the lack of foundation that guarantees its signified”. Thus, the process of subjectification becomes the effect of an articulation.

Discourse gains strength and meaning, as its manifestations gain vitality and become central in the identification of individuals with the recognition of other individuals to agglutinate divergent interests.

Poststructuralist language is the second category addressed and is like a complex of theoretical constructs in an unstable system of referents. Therefore, it is always impossible to fully grasp the meaning of a certain action, a text, or an intention.

Poststructuralism was the product of this fusion of euphoria and disappointment, liberation and dissipation, carnival, and catastrophe, which has occurred since the 1960s. Unable to break the structures of state power, poststructuralism saw it as possible, instead, to subvert the structures of language (Eagleton, 2009).

For Lacan and Foucault, through the theories initially linked to structuralism, the structures of language are questioned with the criticism of the Saussurean system, “[...] for the defense of the fluctuation of meanings of the signifier and for the de-structuring of the unity of the sign” (Lopes, 2013, p. 13).

According to Lacan (1998), the meaning of what is said follows the action of this speech, as it will depend on the relationship with the Other. The primacy to the signifier that resists the signified occurs and, therefore, inverts the relationship that Saussure confers on the signifier relationship and the meaning.

Derrida (2003) criticizes the system of the Saussurian structure, which is established as static and without original meaning in the language. This is endowed with complementary representations, that is, always open to filling in spaces/gaps of signified, such as writing.

The third category listed refers to discourse theory, which provides the elements for the analysis and interpretation of research phenomena. It relies on semiotics, with emphasis on researchers such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.

In poststructuralism, the relations postulated in Saussure's semiotics inform that the signifier and the signified are mutually related, with the autonomy and predominance of the signifier over the meaning.

For Saussure (2012), the language reduced to its essential principle is only a nomenclature, that is, a list of terms. The word is of a vocal or psychic nature and the bond that unites a name to something else is a seemingly simple operation. The linguistic sign unites, in addition to the sign (word), the concept and an acoustic image. The author points out that the acoustic image is not simply a material sound, but the psychic impression of this sound, the representation that provides the senses and the very construction of the abstraction of the concept.

Saussure (2012) proposes to retain the term sign to designate the total and to replace the terms "concept" and "acoustic image", respectively, by meaning and signifier. The bond that unites the signifier to the signified is arbitrary, that is, the sign is arbitrary. This question relates the word-symbol to designate the linguistic sign, called signifier by the author.

Thus, for Saussure (2012), the concept of discourse construction differs from language (*langue*) and speech (*parole*). *Langue* is related to the structure of language and *parole* to the way it is articulated in relation to language.

Therefore, the conception of discourse is related to the various ways of appropriation of the speaker in the language environment, considering the entire symbolic system to which it belongs.

Discourse becomes a collective and social construction, produced through coexistence and in collective relationships, structured by language, in multiple contexts, and considers subjectivities.

Costa and Lopes (2013, p. 63) understand discourse theory “[...] as a powerful theoretical contribution that makes it possible to think of politics as a discursive dispute in favor of the hegemony of signifiers in curricular policy through a tendency to its emptying”.

Derrida (2002) suggests that ways of thinking are complemented by writing and, and, together, symbolized in its absence. Thus, thought needs writing, as a language to be concretized, and writing enables the social elaboration of meanings.

For Lacan, there is in of the signs’ records a disconnection with Saussure’s definition of classical semiotics:

What is unheard of is that men understood very well that the symbol could only be a broken piece, and this, if I may say so, has always been. But the unheard of is also that they did not see at the time, that this included the unity and reciprocity of the signifier and the signified – and, as a consequence, originally, the signified does not mean anything, it is only the sign of arbitration between two signifiers for their choice – sign of arbitration and, therefore, not of the arbitrary (Lacan, 2007, p. 37).

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As Lacan (2007) points out, the structure of the signifier does not mean anything or can mean anything. Thus, the signified is no longer attached to the notion of signifier, as well as the sign, previously idealized by the acoustic image added to the concept, is deconstructed, and appears a few times in the Lacanian scene. For the author, meaning appears when there is a disjunction of signifiers forming a chain called the basal chain, which is defined by the formula S1-S2 (relation of signifiers that form meanings).

The structure of the signifier in Lacan is of great interest for the studies of educational phenomena, as the signifier always anticipates the meaning constructed by the individual, offered and conjugated by the dynamic

environment of social relations and stimuli present in the school and its surroundings. Therefore, it is in the chain of the signifier and under the action of the individual that meaning exists, in a fundamental relationship for this dimension.

Thus, Lacan (1998, p. 87) discusses the “[...] social bond, called discourse, that is, what can be produced by language, and performs the role of social bond”. The author states that this is how the individual is situated in relation to his being. On discursive structures, Lacan points out that:

The discourses under consideration are nothing more than the signifier articulation, the apparatus, whose mere presence, the existing status, dominates and governs everything that can eventually arise from words. They are speeches without the word, which then comes to be lodged in them. Thus, it can be said, regarding this intoxicating phenomenon called taking the floor, that certain demarcations of the discourse in which this is inserted would perhaps be of such a nature that, from time to time, one does not take it without knowing what is doing (Lacan, 1992, p. 158).

14 Through the articulation of the terms S1-S2, it is possible to distinguish the discourse of the master, the university student, the hysterical and the analyst. For Lacan, the discursive position in the university is formed by four discourses, as Ferrari (2010) points out:

From the four discursive positions, we can establish different relationships between knowledge and truth in the university context. The relations between knowledge and truth provided by the discourse of the master and university student present an instituted and unshakable knowledge, and can be considered as an obstacle to the function provided by the discourse of the analyst and the hysterical discourse. The analyst's discourse provides, in fact, the production of knowledge constructed by a desiring individual; knowing that it prevails in place of the truth, causing any type of totalitarian knowledge to falter. [...] We believe, therefore, that the circularity of discourses at the university level is fundamental for the evolution of relations with knowledge at the university (Ferrari, 2010, p. 35).

Foucault (2011, p. 23) understands truth “[...] as a product of discursive genres, composed of a set of rules that are used to build well-formed

sentences or ideas, which is often used to manipulate or strengthen power relations”.

The different concepts and definitions take language as a social phenomenon and understand it as a fundamental aspect for discourse theory.

Another relevant category for education is Discourse Theory, with emphasis on the Political Theory of Discourse communicated by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, with significant effects on the fields of educational studies of the curriculum. In the view of Destro, Santos and Ramos, the political theory of discourse:

[...] has been incorporated as a theoretical-strategic notion/operator that both delineates the understanding of the social as discursive and enables the political interpretation of the negotiations and contextual disputes about the future projects outlined from education (Destro; Santos; Ramos, 2022, p. 51).

According to Leach (2002), more than fifty theories known as discursive can be found, with derivations for several other proposals that help in the interpretation of scientific research.

Language as a concept is part of the structure of discourse, according to Laclau and Mouffe (2011). Discourse as a system is not limited to speech or writing, but encompasses the activities and relationships that attribute social meaning to the regulation of articulatory practice and the organization of these relationships – what researchers call political discourse.

The political term, for Laclau (2011), represents the antagonistic experience or the displacement in the structure that can produce articulations, without contradicting the hegemonic conformation.

For Laclau (2011, p. 10), discourse is equivalent to “[...] a relational totality of signifiers that limit the signified of practices and that, when hegemonically articulated, constitute a discursive formation”.

Regarding the demands, Laclau (2013) mentions that they are the result of the adjustment and organization of the needs linked to an established order and, as this order cannot fully reach the demand, it cannot constitute a rational totality. Therefore, for the author, there are no fixed identities and policies that precede the process of organization and deliberation of the individuals.

In research in education, focusing on the production of knowledge, Laclau and Mouffe (2011) contribute to poststructuralist reading, highlighting the social and linguistic structure, which refuse fixed identities, such as open and decentralized.

Poststructuralist texts have helped to close the gap and the difference between the registration of the literary text category and the critical instance. It is as if the texts of a critical nature of scientific production approached the literary text.

Another significant contribution to education in Jacques Derrida (2001) is the deconstruction conception of the architecture of the sign. As counterpoints of analysis, knowledge starts to be explained as a discourse linked to power and the concept of deconstruction is related to the identity and difference dyad. For the author, the relations of identity and difference are organized around binary oppositions.

Questioning identity and difference as power relations means to problematize the binarism around which they are organized. Thus, normalizing identity, which means choosing arbitrarily, becomes one of the most subtle processes by which power manifests itself in the field of identity and difference (Derrida, 2001, p. 51).

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Every identity proposes normalization and, according to Silva,

[...] it is one of the most subtle processes by which power manifests itself in the space of identity and difference. Normalizing is nothing more than attributing to this identity all possible characteristics, that other identities can only be evaluated in a negative way (Silva, 2005, p. 34).

The poststructuralist perspective tries to deconstruct the countless binarism of knowledge that conceives and elaborates the curriculum: masculine/feminine, fat/thin, white/black, educator/repressor (Silva, 2005).

The changes, construction/deconstruction of identities, are capable of being produced and stimulated in the school space, either by the criticism of the established identity or by the already settled identities.

The fifth concept listed is related to the notion of power, which Foucault (1977, p. 135) conceives “[...] not as something that is possessed, nor as

something fixed, nor as starting from a center, but as a relationship, mobile and fluid, as a capillary and being everywhere”.

[...] it is necessary to think of the reconceptualized individual in a new position, displaced or decentralized, within the paradigm. It seems that it is in the attempt to rearticulate the relationship between individuals and discursive practices that the issue of identity, or perhaps, in this case, identification, appears if we emphasize the process of subjectification (Foucault, 1977, p. 45).

For Foucault:

[...] there is no power that does not use knowledge, especially knowledge that is expressed through understanding. It is also the power for the author, which is at the origin of the process by which we become individuals of a certain type (Foucault, 1977, p. 71).

The Foucauldian conception points out that power relations are mobile, reversible, and unstable and are not given in their totality. Such factors propose that power is defined or settled, that is, identity can become a difference.

With the interest in the studies of the educational curriculum, the individual may be constituted by different identities based on cultural, social, discursive, and non-discursive practices, in individual or institutionalized power relations, with identities that may be hidden by certain hegemonic discourses.

Final considerations

In view of the contributions of the perspectives, references and analyzes of the various authors mentioned, it can be inferred that poststructuralist theories promote a break with the linear models present in structuralist methodologies, especially when they support the political analyzes of the contexts of education research.

Finally, when performing the analytical and theoretical synthesis on the contributions of poststructuralism to quantitative research in education, it is observed that these relationships constitute a challenge for the construction of

critical thinking in teaching, in the design of the curriculum, in the relationships of people and in the influence on the environments of coexistence around spaces and times of the school.

Throughout the present work, the following poststructuralist theoretical categories were addressed: individual, language, political theory of discourse, deconstructivism and power relations.

These categories allow qualitative research in education to appropriate poststructuralist characteristics such as the subjectivation and decentralization of the individual, political contexts and times, the construction of realities with a wealth of details, language, the emphasis on the relational nature of totalities, the arbitrary character of the sign, the primacy of the signifier over the signified, the concern with the nature of writing, among others.

In view of the above, the guiding question of this investigation was duly answered from the analysis of the contributions of the five theoretical categories in the construction of poststructuralist thinking and reasoning in education research, according to the qualitative approach.

18 As results of this investigation, the convergence of poststructuralist perspectives and qualitative research in education stand out, which seek to understand the phenomenon of study in its usual natural environment to reconstruct reality, as observed by people.

Poststructuralist thinking and the qualitative approach to education reveal the understanding of decentralized and unstructured foundations and constructions based on the idea of discourse, without the application of fixed archetypes that give rise to fixed definitions of signified.

As already discussed, the hypothetical-deductive model does not support the universe of possibilities and the discursive interrelationships, intended in the poststructural interpretive perspectives, since it articulates rigid methodological procedures with contingent explanatory models, without allowing criticism of the method or the discourse.

In the qualitative research approach, even with methods that give rise to applicability criteria, the researcher is not prevented from writing in other ways and for different audiences at different times. Therefore, there is no single way or mode of composing a scientific text, as writing with alternative styles or

methodologies also increases the possibilities and opportunities to reach other audiences.

In this research, it is worth mentioning that five theoretical categories were presented that show poststructuralist reasoning in education, based on Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Such poststructuralist categories are discourses conceived in the real, in the study of educational phenomena, articulated to the various possibilities of qualitative methods, according to the following theoretical-methodological summary.

The first category is the individual. According to Derrida (2003), the deconstruction of the individual's perception requires the inversion of the structure or social and cultural context. In poststructuralism, the essentialist conceptions of the individual are abandoned, with the search for the process of their subjectivation. The manifestations of the individual begin to be carried out by the discourse, with the agglutination of divergent interests. Regarding the study of the individual in poststructuralism, the qualitative research considers the importance of the interpretative richness and the contextualization of the environments, with a recent, natural, and holistic point of view on the phenomenon, promoting a depth in the analysis of the data.

Regarding language, Lacan (1998) points out that the meaning of speech follows its action, as it depends on the relationship with the Other. Derrida (2003) proposes that language is dynamic, alive, contextual, and endowed with complementary representations, open to filling in gaps of signified. In this context, language produces meaning and creates social reality. In the educational process, carried out at school, language and different discourses create their own structures and give it meaning, in which power can be contested and (inter)subjectivity constructed. Language in qualitative research allows reflective thinking and writing, from positions and times, with the cultivation of the researcher's own voice, which validates writing as a method of knowledge.

The political theory of discourse, according to Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2011), constitutes the collective and social construction, conceived in coexistence and in collective relationships and organized by language, considering the contexts and subjectivities. The discourse contains the activities and

relationships that attribute social meaning to the regulation of the practice of political relationships. Qualitative research and poststructuralism together produce the reflexivity contained in the political and ideological agendas thought and articulated in the discursive dispute of the school's curriculum and social practices.

Deconstruction is the central theme in the poststructuralist perspective of Derrida (2001), with emphasis on qualitative research in education in the conception of deconstruction of the architecture of the sign. For Derrida (2002), knowledge is the discourse related to power and deconstruction regarding identity and difference, organized around binary oppositions. Binarism and the construction/deconstruction of identities are susceptible to production in the school space, from the already settled identities.

Foucault (1977) conceives that all power uses the knowledge expressed in knowledge. Power is defined or settled and identity can become a difference, since power relations are mobile, unstable, and reversible and are not given in their totality. For Foucault (1977), where there are teaching and learning relationships, there will be power and the emergence of resistance. The poststructuralist category on the notion of power exposes the problematization of educational dysfunctions, such as the ideological choice of curricular contents, forms of evaluation, among others. The methodological strategies of qualitative research in education help to articulate and organize aspects of the notion of power, with the agendas of debates on teacher formation and pedagogical practices produced in the classroom, based on the formative demands of students, thought of as individuals of their own formation.

We alert to the emergence of the application of qualitative methods related to the study of educational phenomena that adopt poststructuralist theoretical perspectives. Such criteria and care will justify the evaluation and interpretation of the data obtained, affirming the principles of internal and external validity of the research as criteria that define quality and reliability.

As a challenge, the researcher has the possibility of creating systems and methods that allow reaching the universe of meanings and representations, about to be unveiled in the pluralities found in the broad and complex social context.

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Dr. Dalton Gean Perovano
Diretor de Ensino e Pesquisa
Secretaria de Estado da Segurança Pública do Paraná (Brasil)
Grupo de Pesquisa Cognição, Aprendizagem e Desenvolvimento Humano (PPGEd/
UFPR)
Orcid id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2606-0189>
E-mail: dgperovano@gmail.com

Prof.ª Dr.ª Sônia Maria Chaves Haracemiv
Universidade Federal do Paraná (Brasil)
Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação
Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação Teoria e Prática de Ensino
Grupo de Pesquisa Linha de Cognição, Aprendizagem e Desenvolvimento Humano
Orcid id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9305-5227>
E-mail: sharacemiv@ufpr.br

Name and E-mail of the translator
Affonso Henriques Nunes
affonsohennunes@gmail.com

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