

## Dissemination and democratization of knowledge in times of academic-scientific productivism

### ARTICLE

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### Abstract

Based on research in education as the object of analysis, the objective of this article is to discuss how the concept of academic productivism helps us understand the production of knowledge in education and its dissemination process in light of the productive demands that direct Brazilian postgraduate studies. We problematize the current situation of this debate when Brazilian postgraduate policy emphasizes research production as an institutional evaluation criterion, homogenizing metrics that may contribute to possible theoretical and methodological weaknesses. This is bibliographic and documentary research with theoretical support based on the Marxist approach that articulates the economic, political and social condition of capitalist society with the production of knowledge in education. In this sense, we affirm the need for a debate on the research movement in light of productive pressures and the way in which this demand subverts the logic of knowledge as a common good to the logic of the market, redefining the very idea of knowledge production.

**Keywords:** Research in education. Postgraduate studies. Productivism. Knowledge production.

### Difusão e democratização de conhecimento em tempos de produtivismo acadêmico-científico

### Resumo

Partindo da pesquisa em educação como objeto de análise, o objetivo deste artigo é debater sobre como o conceito de produtivismo acadêmico nos ajuda a compreender a produção de conhecimento em educação e seu processo de divulgação e de difusão frente às exigências produtivas que dirigem a pós-graduação brasileira. Problematizamos a situação atual desse debate quando a política brasileira de pós-graduação enfatiza a produção da pesquisa como critério de avaliação institucional, homogeneizando métricas que podem contribuir para possíveis fragilidades teórico-metodológicas. Trata-se de pesquisa bibliográfica e documental com aporte teórico pautado na abordagem marxista que articula a condição econômico-político-social da sociedade capitalista à produção de

conhecimento em educação. Nesse sentido, afirmamos a necessidade do debate sobre o movimento de pesquisa frente às pressões produtivas e a forma como essa demanda subverte a lógica do conhecimento como bem comum à lógica do mercado, ressignificando a própria ideia da produção de conhecimento.

**Palavras-chave:** Pesquisa em educação. Pós-graduação. Produtivismo. Produção de conhecimento.

## 1 Introduction

In recent years, we have studied and researched the production of knowledge in education from two points of view, one theoretical-methodological and one political-institutional. Considering education research as the object of analysis in these studies, we have problematized issues related to both the practice of education research and the training of researchers in this rich and complex area. Based on these problematizations, a concern has arisen in relation to the education research movement itself in Brazil, which has brought the concept of productivism to the center of this debate on the production of knowledge.

Productivism has been discussed by various areas of knowledge, since it is a concept that carries ideological issues and traces of a society governed by capital and market interests. According to Menna-Barreto (2012, p. 49),

[...] Productivism is an interesting neologism that makes a distinction with the root words: product, production, productive, productivity, etc. The neologism's definitive feature lies in the identification of an associated ideology, which seems to me to lie in the emphasis (if not exclusivity) of numbers.

With regard to the emphasis on numbers, in a movement in which what counts is the quantification of products, we see a debate in academia about different ways of perceiving this movement in the practice of carrying out research. Thinking more specifically about education research, there are two groups that bring different arguments and perspectives to this issue.

Considering the production of knowledge in education, one of the perspectives argues that performativity has changed the culture of research. Authors such as Macedo

(2015) and Macedo and Sousa (2010) claim that there is a movement that is part of the common trajectory of research and that other areas of the Humanities and Social Sciences have already joined in. These authors point out that the term productivism refers to an inducement to publish in order to meet the expectations of funding agencies and not as a movement of precarious production.

From this theoretical perspective, the classification and quantification model, which takes into account indicators, peer reviews and the availability of resources, is evaluated positively, as the increase in production favors dialogue around the knowledge produced and helps to attract funding for education. For this approach, the productivity movement is related to the growth and development of the field of education itself.

With regard to the other theoretical perspective on the issue of productivism, it reflects concern about the academic-productive standards that have been set by the institutional evaluation system, pointing out that there is a need for the productive pressure to be questioned and reviewed due to the mismatch between production requirements and the quality of what has been recognized as knowledge production in the field of education.

Kuenzer and Moraes (2005) and Trein and Rodrigues (2011) point out that the research movement, governed by the pressure for numbers, can cause weaknesses arising from lightening and mass production in favor of the aspiration to increase the number of research projects and qualifications in the academic market. In this approach, academia is experiencing a process of commodification that translates into academic productions and the reproduction of market values typical of a neoliberal policy, where knowledge that should be treated as a public and common good is reframed to serve interests other than the social good.

For Bottallo (2024), in arguing for a slowdown in science, the author states that we are living in a period in which the quantity of articles published is worth more than quality, because in the productivist method, authors who have more financial means and institutional conditions to produce end up having advantages.

It is in the midst of the academic-scientific debate on productivism that we consider the objective and problematization of this article. Based on the clashes presented and

concerns about the production of knowledge in education, we present our research problem, questioning the current state of this debate when Brazilian postgraduate policy increasingly emphasizes research as an evaluation criterion, homogenizing indicators and criteria that may contribute to some possible theoretical-methodological weaknesses linked to the research movement. We understand that this problem can contribute to a more in-depth reflection on the production of knowledge in education and the way it has been re-signified in the current context of increased production requirements in the face of the demands of institutional evaluations that surround and surround academia.

Based on this problematization, the aim of this article is to discuss how the concept of academic productivism helps us to understand the production of knowledge in education and its process of dissemination and diffusion in the face of the productive demands that drive Brazilian postgraduate studies.

Among the two theoretical perspectives that deal with the productive demands of research in education, based on an understanding that we cannot think about the movement of research without conditioning it to the demands of society, we chose the path of dialogue with authors who think about academic-scientific productivism, understanding it as an extension of the market interests that are part of the construction of education in capitalist society.

As an initial step in the theoretical study of this work, we held important conceptual debates in the Group of Studies and Research in Higher Education and Research in Education - ESPE, organized at the Multidisciplinary Institute of the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro, which has given us theoretical support based on categories such as merchandise, use value and exchange value to think about the logic of knowledge production in education considering the clashes inherent in a society governed by capital and market demands, where education as an institution of this system walks with defined directions beyond its proper social role.

The research group's discussions have revolved around reading Karl Marx's book 'Capital' (1988), in which we propose to think about the concept of merchandise, use value

and exchange value and to think about the very condition of capitalist society in order to question the movement of academic-scientific research in recent years.

According to Moura and Borba (2021), a current criticism among many researchers in the field of education, but also in other fields, questions the correspondence between the number of publications and the quality of the knowledge produced. These specific questions are based on our position, which has a historical background, that the institutionality of the very condition of research in institutional spaces imposes a specific dynamic on the practice of research, involving a theoretical-methodological exercise that is indispensable to knowledge.

Thinking about the pressures imposed by quantitative evaluation systems, we question the current situation of this debate when Brazilian policy, especially in postgraduate studies, emphasizes research as the main evaluation criterion, making us question the values of knowledge production in education. However, considering that this is not a hegemonic position in the field of education and that the theoretical clashes are diverse in relation to the research movement, we propose to debate the possible articulations that address the issue of academic productivism and the process of production, dissemination and diffusion of knowledge in education.

In 2011, the Report of the CNPq's Research Integrity Commission raised concerns about research movements and addressed the need to practice good conduct in scientific and technological research, since the practice of research has become a matter of discussion in the international community and in Brazil (Brasil, 2011).

The research we are presenting helps us to think about the practice of research, as we sought to systematize some dimensions of the knowledge produced in education, taking productivism as the main concept. This article presents part of a theoretical-conceptual debate that reflects the concerns and anxieties regarding the practice of research in education and the training of researchers. This proposal is part of a series of studies on the subject of 'educational research' carried out since 2009, which has unfolded at different points of analysis, but always with a focus on educational research.

For this analysis, we consider productivism as an element of reflection on the production of knowledge in education, which interferes with research practice if we think about theoretical-methodological issues and the training of researchers in the field, taking into account the political-institutional relations that are established in academia. By raising and presenting the debates on academic production and its dissemination process, we contribute to a stronger and more grounded position against the attacks that have been made on the broad area of the Humanities and Social Sciences.

## 2 Methodology

Considering the different ways of conducting research and the very practice of research in education, we have set out to research, in recent years, some of the debates that have taken place in these productions that can reflect thematic concerns in the educational field. Among the themes linked directly or indirectly to educational research, we have looked at the concept of productivism and how it can influence or interfere with the practice of educational research and the production of knowledge in the field.

Education is an extremely rich and complex field of knowledge that brings up many ways of thinking about reality and building debates about research practices. With this in mind, and considering the possibilities for analyzing the issues surrounding the field of education, we set out to carry out a theoretical debate in order to think about the concept of productivism and its challenges in educational research, through bibliographical and documentary research, especially based on the document 'Ethics and Integrity in Scientific Practice', drawn up by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) in 2011, where concern about academic care and ethical issues in research have gained new meanings considering the new productive contexts implemented by funding agencies.

The choice to take a closer look at the document on Ethics and Integrity (Brasil, 2011) is justified by the fact that it deals with a delicate moment for the production of knowledge in Brazil, in which the practice of fraud related to research has come to light,

demanding action from funding agencies. The Report of the CNPq Research Integrity Commission, published on October 7, 2011, presents some definitions such as fabrication or invention of data, falsification, plagiarism and self-plagiarism, reflecting the scenario of concern with the practice of research that was established at the time. In addition, the Report sets out some guidelines for good conduct in scientific and technological research in order to resolve some of the problems that had been occurring in the field of research.

In order to think about the path to be taken to carry out the research, it was necessary to consider the growing number of educational research projects, which has resulted in the expansion and diversification of academic-scientific material produced in recent years. This growth has led to new ways of conducting and consolidating new research themes in education, reflected in the increase in the number of articles published and journals created.

Studying with and about journals has been one of the paths taken in our research and lines of study to think about research in education, because, according to Alvarenga (1996, p. 64), “this type of publication is one of the most recognized means of research communication”, especially between researchers and their peers, helping with the processes of dissemination and diffusion of scientific knowledge in the country. Along with the function of disseminating knowledge, the journal also has “the role of validating and hierarchizing the scientist, since the journal as an institutional medium has rules, values and rewards related to production and publication” (Moura, 2018, p. 20).

Considering the theoretical and epistemological vastness of the field of education, it is up to the process of methodological characterization of the research, not only the choice of the type of research to be carried out, which in this case is characterized by the bibliographic and documentary approach, but also the presentation of the theoretical perspective that directs our debates. Before presenting our theoretical-conceptual and epistemological options for analyzing the material collected, it is worth explaining the choice of types of research.

This article is organized on the basis of bibliographical and documentary research in which the materials were analyzed using a Marxist approach, bringing socio-historical

configurations to the analysis process. The choice of bibliographical research for this study reflects the concern with what has been produced and publicized on the subject of productivism and its links with the practice of research in education and the production of knowledge.

With regard to bibliographic research, according to Marconi and Lakatos (2021), bibliographic research provides the researcher with the means to question and solve not only known problems, but also to explore new or still developing issues, as well as allowing the scientist a kind of parallel reinforcement in the survey and analysis of their research and the information collected throughout their studies. According to Severino (2016, p. 131), bibliographic research “is that which is carried out based on the available record, resulting from previous research [...] It uses data or theoretical categories that have already been worked on by other researchers, duly recorded”.

With regard to documentary research, this type of research was chosen to support bibliographic research, because according to Severino (2016), it is research that, in addition to materials that have already been recorded and analyzed, also presents content from newspaper texts and legal documents that have not yet been analyzed, as is the case with the Report of the Research Integrity Commission.

According to Marconi and Lakatos (2021), research is initially carried out by collecting data, in order to gather previous information about the field of interest and, in this sense, we understand that for this work, bibliographical research and documentary research complement each other in the face of such a delicate and complex issue that divides so many opinions in the area of education and that needs further debate.

Further to the analysis by Marconi and Lakatos (2021), documentary research takes written or unwritten documents as its source of data collection, which are called primary sources. According to the authors, data collection in scientific research can be done in two ways: “documentary research (or primary sources) and bibliographic research (or secondary sources)” (Marconi and Lakatos, 2021, p. 190). Based on the definitions of the types of research that characterize this study, we can confirm that in addition to



presenting the technical choices as to which type of research best characterizes the study undertaken, it is essential to present the epistemological choices and approaches.

We start from the position that within the movement of research construction and the production of knowledge in education, only the choice of the type of research to be carried out and the procedural description of the development of the research do not account for the theoretical-methodological and theoretical-conceptual and epistemological construction of the research. In this sense, it is necessary to point out the theoretical ground from which our concerns originate.

Different theoretical assumptions have been guiding the work of investigation in the practice of educational research. We understand that in the practice of scientific research there are traces of an understanding of the methodological process as an action to present instruments and techniques or a specific description of research phases. This way of treating the method, highlighting the importance of technical procedures in research work, does not recognize that scientific research is also constituted beyond technical norms, but advances to the importance of theoretical-conceptual and epistemological foundations.

Gil (2021) states that in order for knowledge to be considered scientific, it is necessary to determine the method that made it possible to arrive at this knowledge, but methodological construction goes further. We agree with Severino (2016) when he states that the movement of scientific knowledge can follow a method, but must be based on epistemological foundations, i.e. “[...] it is not enough to follow a method and apply techniques to complete the understanding of the general procedure of science. This procedure must also refer to an epistemological foundation that supports and justifies the methodology itself” (Severino, 2016, p. 106).

Based on Cardoso's position (1996, p. 90), where he states that “the emphasis is on the process, not the product”, we understand that the theoretical-conceptual debate and the discussion about the method are not accessories in research, but reflect the very constitution of systematic and rigorous research.

According to Borba, Portugal and Silva (2008, p. 13), “Concern about the scientific explanation of educational phenomena has given rise to different research projects that are born from different epistemological perspectives”. Faced with the many ways of understanding the place of theory in educational research, we consider it important to highlight our theoretical assumptions for analyzing the material worked on for this research, in order to think about the issues surrounding academic-scientific productivism.

There are several possible ways of thinking about the problem of productivism, especially in the context of Brazilian postgraduate studies, but in order to do so, we need to understand education as an institution of a specific system in a specific society. As previously stated, for this research we considered the Marxist approach from a historical-social perspective of analysis, because according to Gil (2021, p. 7), the Marxist approach helps to analyze “the development of society through a materialist interpretation of its historical development and adopts a dialectical view of social transformation”. In this sense, the materialist-historical approach helps us to understand how education works in Brazil and, consequently, the processes of production and reproduction of educational processes, including the production of knowledge in education.

Based on the Research Group's debates on the relationship between the needs and demands of capitalist society and their influence on the field of education, we have debated research in education from different points of view, such as teaching work, the training of researchers, the processes of financialization and commercialization of education and academic productivism. Working from a social-historical perspective has helped us to understand that education, as an important institution for the functioning of the system, occupies a privileged place in the interests of the state, not thinking of education as a right for all or as a common good, but as a means of helping the system to train subjects who are technically and ideologically suited to a given society.

In the materialist-historical approach, it is possible to understand the relationship between education and society, as well as the relationship between education and the production of knowledge in today's society, because it is necessary to think about what kind of knowledge is being produced and for whom this knowledge is intended. Through

historical materiality, we can reflect on the conditions of life in society at a given time and space with its economic-political-social conditioning factors, reflecting the way in which men are organized and produced in society and the roles played by the institutions that make up that society.

After the methodological presentation of the types of research used in this work and the theoretical grounds we propose to study in order to understand the problem of academic productivism in capitalist society, we move on to discuss the results and debates on the subject.

### 3 Results and Discussion

There are many possible relationships and correlations to think about the ways in which the production of knowledge in education in Brazil is signified and re-signified. Based on the bibliographic material studied, we understand that there is a relationship between the capital system and educational policies and reforms, where the demands of capital and the market guide, or at least drive, the socio-political dimensions, altering the dynamics of production in the context of the functioning of educational institutions. In this context, the production of knowledge not only accompanies the changes imposed on education, but is also responsible for feeding a certain market ideology within the processes of organizing and systematizing higher education, especially in the context of postgraduate studies.

We understand that postgraduate studies in education appear to be a privileged space for research into different themes and the educational process. However, we need to think about how this production has been consolidated over the years in relation to the objectives of postgraduate studies. Throughout its process of organization and consolidation, “Brazilian postgraduate studies have expanded and affirmed themselves, achieving high standards of quality and, in several areas, international credibility” (Kuenzer; Moraes, 2005, p. 1342). However, throughout its history, postgraduate studies have been transformed and adapted to the changes in society.

According to Moraes (2001, p. 10), “our postgraduate programs, obliged to meet the requirements of the monitoring and evaluation system” have seen their objectives change over the years, along with the changes in the National Postgraduate Plan (PNPG). With the development of postgraduate courses and changes in the PNPGs, there have been transformations in the objectives of Brazilian postgraduate courses, where there has been “a shift from the centrality of teaching to the centrality of research” (Kuenzer; Moraes, 2005, p. 1347). When they were created in the 1960s, the aim of postgraduate courses, in the Master's and Doctorate modalities, was to train a workforce of teachers capable of meeting the expansion of higher education and paving the way for scientific research in Brazil. However, this objective has undergone changes, until it has come to the point where priority is given to scientific production, especially in an attempt to keep up with the production requirements of funding agencies.

The production of knowledge in postgraduate courses is fundamental to the growth of the economic machine linked to the field of education (Moura; Borba, 2021). According to the authors, the economy linked to education not only produces a growing number of undergraduates, postgraduates and intellectual productions, it also produces and reproduces a network of interests that has been gaining new proportions in recent decades.

In Mancebo's analysis (2011, p. 74), Brazilian higher education has increasingly taken on the character of a business, “losing its character as an institution of society focused on human formation and the production of knowledge engaged in solving national problems.” Mancebo (2011) states that thinking about the teaching condition in higher education based on the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s implies understanding that they affected not only objective aspects of the relationships between teachers and the organization of work, but also led to changes in the very way in which work and the roles of teachers are signified, implying the productive organization of knowledge.

According to Sguissardi (2017), higher education in Brazil does not prioritize public interests, and this is reflected in higher education policies. In this sense, education loses its sense of functioning and production for the public and the common good, increasingly taking on a market context.

For Leher (2021, p. 10), the market and production context in educational processes can be seen “through a combination of ideologies, such as the so-called theory of human capital, combined with utilitarian beliefs [...] that profoundly alter the daily life of institutions and expressly interfere in their social functions”. Still in Leher's analysis (2021, p. 12), “the commodification of education is not restricted to managerial practices and the training *ethos*, as it is inserted in the bowels of the circuits of capital and, especially, the production of surplus value” and is capable of interfering in the very configuration of education and the production of knowledge.

The problems related to the commercialization of academic production are not recent issues, but in the current moment in which research is inserted, given the growing quantitative demand linked to the processes of production, dissemination and diffusion of knowledge, many researchers find themselves instructed to produce academically, within an academicist and quantitativist logic where numbers prevail.

In an attempt to seek a standard of excellence and to legitimize scientific standards for the field of education, a prioritization of productivity began to prevail in postgraduate studies, since “it can be seen, for example, in the determination of an ideal minimum quantity to be published and in the differentiated valuation through the *Qualis* system” (Vilaça; Palma, 2013, p. 468).

According to Vilaça and Palma (2013, p. 470), “there are already, generically, economic and competitive traits in academia”. In this sense, we understand that there is a productivity standard for the production of knowledge in postgraduate studies. In the incessant search for ever higher productivity targets, some authors have raised concerns about possible academic fraud, concealed by discourses on the need to publicize results and disseminate knowledge produced in academia.

Nascimento, Cruz and Moura (2023) argue that the logic of knowledge production in education is linked to the evaluation processes of academic-scientific production and the ways in which educational policies are dealt with in the context of training, which in turn are linked to the organization of the world economy itself, typical of a society governed by capital and under market guidelines:

In higher education, the logic of the market turns scientific production into a kind of commodity, orienting this activity, especially in postgraduate studies, towards productivity and quantity for the purposes of funding, grades and scholarships (Nascimento; Cruz; Moura, 2023, p. 12).

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The interests linked to production processes are not confined to funding and curriculum per se, but also point to other interests. The productive-market logic present in academia, which supports the productivist and meritocratic orientation, takes on not only an academic and administrative role, but also a political and bureaucratic role woven by economic and power relations. In this sense, the relationship between the production of knowledge is linked to who produces it and what it is produced for. It's not just about academic production in its econometric sense, but about what kind of knowledge has been produced in the context of education's own objectives. This question has led us to concern ourselves with the production and dissemination of knowledge.

Considering that no institution walks without a direction that is linked to the economic, political and social conditions of society, it is possible to understand the directions imposed on education, the subjects who occupy this institution in various ways and the productions linked to it.

Following the debates presented, we understand that the way in which the production process has been instituted in the field of education leads to the concerns presented by the CNPq, back in 2011, regarding the ethical issues of research and the integrity of research itself:

The need for good conduct in scientific and technological research has been a growing concern for the international community and Brazil is no different. Misconduct is not a recent phenomenon, given the many examples that history has given us of fraud and falsification of results. Publications presuppose the veracity and suitability of what the authors record in their articles [...] (Brasil, 2011, p. 1).

Unfortunately, the concern, laden with a certain denunciation, pointed out in the Report of the CNPq Research Integrity Commission (Brazil, 2011), still remains an open

question and indicates concern about the possible weaknesses that this may imply in the production of knowledge and in the process of disseminating scientific production.

The progress made in Brazil's National Postgraduate System is undeniable and, for this progress, we understand the need for new forms of evaluation and new debates on ways of producing and disseminating knowledge. The quest to comply with strict evaluation criteria has had an effect not only on the quantitative increase in production, but also on a concern with the theoretical-methodological and political-institutional issues of research, which makes the debate on academic productivism current and necessary.

## 4 Conclusions

The production of knowledge in the field of education, in the face of productive demands, is a reflection of the context of market society and its economic-political-social biases. This relationship can appear in the development of projects, studies and research that seek to meet the demands of capital, but which have also been present through the internalization and naturalization of the productivist, quantitative and meritocratic values that guide scientific work in a society ruled by capital.

Returning to the objective of this research, which deals with the debate on how the concept of academic productivism helps us to understand the production of knowledge in education and its process of dissemination and diffusion in the face of the productive demands that drive Brazilian postgraduate studies, considering the Brazilian evaluation policy, it is essential to point out that the relationships that are established in the intricacies of postgraduate studies or higher education in general, as well as in other segments of education, do not happen at random. Production processes are linked to larger interests led by the state in its broadest and most voracious sense, which subverts the logic of the common good to the logic of the market, promoting production pressures and concerns in the field of research.

It is important to make it clear that postgraduate courses need to produce research and publish it, since they need to be accountable to the academic world and to society.

However, we need to consider the context of this production and its proximity to productivism, since this movement carries characteristics of a market society and its effects are questionable with regard to the production of knowledge in education.

Finally, we ratify the idea that the pressure of productivism is exaggerated by the agencies and the institution itself and stressful for the teaching collective, even though a large proportion of teachers see such pressures as natural in the name of the progress and dialog provided by research. Such pressures can wear down the researcher and harm the research movement by weakening the investigative activity and impoverishing fundamental problems in the field of education.

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