

SPECIAL ISSUE
**The Construction of Knowledge in Higher Education Studies:
A Southern Perspective**

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**Introduction to the Special Issue: The Construction of
Knowledge in Higher Education Studies: A Southern
Perspective**

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Abstract: This special issue celebrates research in the higher education field with an interest in non-Western lines of inquiry. The six papers here emerge from Latin-America, Spain, the USA and India and draw on multiple perspectives and methodologies. They address tensions and challenges in higher education systems that experienced in concrete contexts and regions but that are yet, to some extent, experienced in higher education systems globally. More specifically, the variety of research questions, theories, methods and contexts displayed here raise critical questions about global forces attached to neoliberalism and competition for prestige, which in turn, frame current practices in higher education. This special issue, therefore, constitutes an

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epistemic space that gives visibility to narratives on higher education that have been in Santos's words, invisible narratives on higher education but that are fast becoming more visible.

Keywords: higher education; critical perspectives; knowledge production; non-Western research

Introducción al número especial: La construcción de conocimiento en educación superior: Una perspectiva del sur

Resumen: Este número especial celebra la investigación en el campo de la educación superior con un interés particular en líneas de investigación no occidentales. Los seis artículos contenidos en este número especial provienen de América Latina, España, Estados Unidos e India y se basan en múltiples perspectivas y metodologías. Abordan tensiones y desafíos en sistemas de educación superior experimentados en contextos y regiones concretos pero que, hasta cierto punto, también afectan a los sistemas de educación superior a nivel mundial. Específicamente, la variedad de preguntas de investigación, teorías, métodos y contextos de los artículos plantean preguntas críticas sobre fuerzas globales vinculadas al neoliberalismo y la competencia por el prestigio que, a su vez, condicionan las prácticas en educación superior. Este número especial, por lo tanto, constituye un espacio epistémico que da visibilidad a las narrativas sobre educación superior que han sido, en palabras de Santos, narrativas invisibles sobre educación superior pero que se están volviendo cada vez más visibles.

Palabras clave: educación superior; perspectivas críticas; producción de conocimiento; investigación no occidental

Introdução ao dossiê: A construção do conhecimento nos estudos superiores: Uma perspectiva do sul

Resumo: Esta edição especial celebra a pesquisa no campo do ensino superior com um interesse particular em linhas de pesquisa não ocidentais. Os seis artigos contidos nesta edição especial vêm da América Latina, Espanha, Estados Unidos e Índia e são baseados em múltiplas perspectivas e metodologias. Abordam as tensões e desafios nos sistemas de ensino superior experimentados em contextos e regiões específicos, mas que, em certa medida, afetam também os sistemas de ensino superior em todo o mundo. Especificamente, a variedade de questões de pesquisa, teorias, métodos e contextos dos artigos levantam questões críticas sobre as forças globais ligadas ao neoliberalismo e a competição por prestígio que, por sua vez, condicionam as práticas no ensino superior. Essa edição especial, portanto, constitui um espaço epistêmico que dá visibilidade às narrativas sobre o ensino superior que têm sido, nas palavras de Santos, narrativas invisíveis sobre o ensino superior, mas que estão se tornando cada vez mais visíveis.

Palavras-chave: ensino superior; perspectivas críticas; produção de conhecimento; pesquisa não-ocidental

Introduction

Higher education, as an area of study, has been developing since the 1960s (Brunner, 2009; Khem, 2015; MacFarlane & Grant, 2012; Teichler, 2000; Tight, 2015, 2012), especially in Anglo-Saxon countries (Calma & Davies, 2017). Also, the production of knowledge concerned with higher education is growing steadily in other parts of the world, and particularly in countries in the so-called 'South' (Guzmán-Valenzuela, Queupil & Ríos, 2019; Guzmán-Valenzuela & Gómez, 2019; Kim, Horta & Jung, 2017).

However, as Santos (2014) points out, some knowledges are invisible, especially those in the South. Invisible knowledges do not represent Western streams of thought and are not usually published in mainstream journals and books. As a result, less value has been ascribed to them, and so they become invisible knowledges. That these knowledges are invisible does not mean, though, that they do not exist. And this is the case for knowledges on higher education produced from a non-Western perspective. The production of less visible knowledges of higher education

in other parts of the world provides an opportunity both to discover and develop new epistemic angles from where to understand higher education in terms of specific institutions and practices and as a response to global forces.

In an attempt to make visible what has been invisible for the community in higher education studies around the world, this special issue has been prepared. The call for publications on knowledge production from a southern perspective had a positive response from authors from different parts of the world. This special issue provides a space to share empirical works that have been produced not only in Latin America, but also in the United States, Spain, and in India. The six papers contained in this special issue – and written in Spanish and English – draw on multiple perspectives to address tensions and challenges experienced in concrete contexts and regions but that are, to some extent, experienced in higher education systems globally. Indeed, higher education processes are naturally bound within national and concrete geographical contexts so that knowledge produced around them are anchored in specific practices, institutions and actors. At the same time, they are shaped and restrained by global trends. All the papers glimpse ways in which global forces attached to neoliberalism and competition for prestige and power frame current practices in higher education.

The Contributions in this Special Issue

The papers in this special issue point to hegemonic narratives in higher education, such as internationalization, prestige, academic productivity, quality commercialization, and the need to respond to industry and the market. As a reply to these hegemonic narratives, the authors of these papers give space to historically unheard tribal voices (Sumida, Chiu & Billy), to think about access and social equality in more holistic terms (Fanelli & Androgué), to interrogate the market and the practices of quality (Srivastava), to question internationalization practices through study-abroad programmes (Wood), to re-think the social responsibility of universities (Noguera & Gaete), and to examine the mechanisms through which knowledge is produced in higher education (Muñoz et al.).

This special issue is divided into two sections. The first section is focused on papers that offer a comparative perspective and that include in their analysis more than one country. This is the case of the paper by Fanelli and Androgué, which focuses on issues of equity and access in Argentina, Perú, and Chile. Also, Noguera and Gaete examines university social responsibility in a group of Latin American countries (Brazil, Venezuela, Chile, Perú, Ecuador, and Colombia). In another paper, Wood investigates student exchange programmes between Cuba and the United States to critically address issues of internationalization. The second section is composed of a group of papers focused on a single country. The first paper, by Srivastava, critically examines the concept of quality by analyzing websites of both public and private universities in India. In turn, Muñoz et al. investigate knowledge production in higher education in Chile and hint at types of research that are usually financed in that country. Finally, Sumida, Chiu and Billy share a long-term case study conducted with tribal colleges in the United States and in which critical voices of indigenous people are heard in relation to internationalization.

All six papers – quite different theoretically – hint at how important it is for higher education studies to expand, relate, and question theories from different disciplines. The six papers use different methodological approaches to examine their research topics. While Fanelli and Androgué use macro- and micro-data to examine issues of funding, equity, and access in universities, Noguera and Gaete and Muñoz et al. use bibliometric analyses jointly with qualitative analyses of key issues of policy to explore university social responsibility in Latin America and research and knowledge production in higher education studies in Chile, respectively. In their papers, Wood and Srivastava deploy qualitative analyses to address their research questions. While Wood conducts a set of interviews with key actors in the United States and Cuba, Srivastava draws on critical discourse analyses guided by critical realism to question

the marketisation of the concept of quality in higher education in India. Finally, Sumida, Chiu and Billy, through a mixed-method analysis with an emphasis on interviews, use a critical lens in indigenous internationalization.

We think that the variety of research questions, theories, methods, and contexts displayed across the papers in this special issue raise critical questions about higher education in countries and contexts that do not represent Western mainstream lines of investigation.

Opening Spaces to New Knowledges around Higher Education

Inequalities in the production of knowledges and their (in)visibility respond to historical, political, social, and financial factors that have been present since the colonial epoch. Over the years, colonialism has evolved in a way that, nowadays, the dependency of fragile regions and communities of the world – in relation to hegemonic narratives that come from powerful groups, institutions and countries – is based not only on financial and political resources but also in epistemic asymmetries (Connell, 2007; Santos, 2014). The more knowledge is produced and published in mainstream journals and books, the more epistemic and symbolic capital that countries and their universities and academics enjoy, so increasing such asymmetries. Drivers of international rankings and internationalization, followed by universities and higher education systems around the world, only reinforce such powerful asymmetries.

This special issue, therefore, constitutes an epistemic space that gives visibility to narratives on higher education that are not usually present in mainstream journals and books. Such narratives have intrinsic value since they give voice to underrepresented groups, countries and regions. At the same time, and considering that EPAA/AAPE is an open-access journal, this special issue is an exercise in the democratisation of knowledges through the creation of a space in which interests, concepts and epistemic tensions are brought together so as to think of knowledges on higher education as multi-located and experienced.

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