

**ALTERITY AND DIALOGUE IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH CONCERNING TEACHERS:  
AN ANALYSIS UNDER BUBER'S PERSPECTIVE**

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Research Support:  
Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de Minas Gerais – FAPEMIG/Brazil

**Abstract**

In this article, we present the results of an epistemological analysis of academic production concerning the teacher, defended in Post-Graduate Programs in the Brazilian Mid-West, from 1999 to 2014. The focus of investigation are the research types and procedures and the theoretical frame of reference that support them. To understand the construction process of the theses and dissertations, the methodology used is described and analysed, as from a phenomenological hermeneutic reading, which is carried out in two moments: the ideographic and the nomothetic. The results show a predominance of case study, the use of interviews, support based on contemporary authors, and, from a Buberian perspective, they indicate that alterity and dialogue are important in scientific investigation.

**Keywords**

Academic Production, Research Types, Research Procedures, Hermeneutic Phenomenology, Alterity, Dialogue, Buberian perspective.

## ALTERITY AND DIALOGUE IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH CONCERNING TEACHERS: AN ANALYSIS UNDER BUBER'S PERSPECTIVE<sup>1</sup>

### 1 Reasons and the focus of this research

Involvement of the research team of the Study Centre concerning the Teacher, Art and Philosophy, of the Post-Graduate Program of the University of Uberaba, along with the Research Network concerning the Teacher in the Mid-West - *Redecentro*, started in 2005. Since then, we have participated in the collaborative activities among all the partner programs<sup>2</sup>. During the epistemological analysis process of the theses and dissertations – purpose of this Network – we shared the results by means of productions that include books, articles, communications at events, as well as theses and dissertations which are constructed in the context of each Program (Abreu-Bernardes, Aidar; Pereira, 2017). This article comes as a sequence in this process for disclosure of the constructed knowledge.

In this text, we present the results of an epistemological analysis of academic productions concerning the teacher, defended in the Programs which make up the *Redecentro*, from 1999 to 2014. As a sample of approach, we selected 10% of the total listed in this inter-institutional project (in a universe of 700 studies among theses and dissertations). The range of our investigative attention are the research types and procedures and the theoretical frame of reference that offers support.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was originally published in Portuguese under the title “The investigative process in academic research concerning teachers: an epistemological analysis” (Abreu-Bernardes, Pereira (2018), as a chapter of the book “Epistemological praxis and Epistemological practise: repercussions in the production of knowledge concerning the teacher”, organized by Magalhães, S. M. O and Souza, R. C. C., and published by Editora Mercado de Letras, Campinas Brazil, that authorized this edition, here in a summarized form, up-dated and adapted to the norms of this journal.

<sup>2</sup> The partner institutions at the time of the gathering of the material for analyses were: Federal University of Goiás; University of Brasília; University of Uberaba; Federal University of Uberlândia; Federal University of Tocantins; Federal University of Mato Grosso; Federal University of Southern Mato Grosso. Currently (2020), the last two have left the project, and the Federal University of Catalão and the UniAraguaia University Centre have become integrated to the Network.

Studies concerning the methodological issues in education research have been shown relevant in current times. We consider along with Gatti (2003), who highlights that the amount of research in the field of education has been extended expressively in the last decades, but this beneficial fact has come accompanied by the emergence of methodological problems in the construction of theses and dissertations and in the theoretical-interpretative analyses. Structural theoretical problems or of theoretical construction, and the use of certain types of procedures for data gathering and analysis (but not only this), occur in a meaningful way in productions in this field. If we observe the marked influence of investigative models from the exact sciences, from the 50s to the 70s, in which, to observe, to measure and to control predominated as scientific criteria, in the 80s, qualitative methodologies appear, that are based on epistemic strands, such as phenomenology, historical dialectics or naturalistic perspectives.

This new perspective (Gatti, 2003), however, does not seem to recognise that both the quantitative and the qualitative methodologies are subject to “all sorts of mishaps due to the association or submission to researcher’s values and attitudes, and even of the person being researched him/herself” (p. 387). The same author still reflects on the fact that, in the two historical periods mentioned, mistakes and shortcomings in the analyses and use of concepts and theories are identified.

If considerations such as these are the basis for initiatives to further epistemological discussion on research methodologies in education, in Bicudo (2011, 2014) we reinforce this perspective of analysis, as we declare that the research types and procedures should be shown, in the sense of conferring them reliability. A meta-analysis study, such as we performed in this text, that approaches theses and dissertations in a reflexive manner, involves data analysis based on a movement of reflection, carried out in a collaborative manner by our research group – the *Redecentro*.

We are likewise on the watch out for events that prioritize the methodological discussion, and that have occurred more and more frequently. It is the case of the Ibero-American Congress in Qualitative Investigation, which emphasizes the research processes, welcomes revisions of the state of art and new investigation perspectives. The main focus of the work is the methodology, in which it is necessary to analyse the relations between methodology and the investigation issues, the theories and the results obtained, based on literature already published on the matter, such as the report presented by our group (Abreu-Bernardes, Bernardes & Reis, 2017). This initiative of discussing the methodological issue is, also, a possible contribution to the debate concerning academic productions.

## **2 Interrogate and not only ask: the initial issues**

We must start off with the assumption that to research is to pursue an interrogation in multiple perspectives, so that we may return to it many times. Interrogation acts as a scenario in which the investigator’s questions come across their theoretical-methodological basis, to make sense. For the development of this analysis, we start off by the guiding interrogation: how does the methodological process develop in academic productions concerning the teacher, defended in the Post-Graduate Programs in Education in the Mid-West? Other questions are proposed: how do the investigators substantiate their methodological choices? What research types and procedures emerge as new tendencies?

We understand that the main purpose of this research is not to focus and map out certain methodological actions, but mainly, to understand the manners in which the methodological elements are organized to constitute a certain construction of knowledge. Thus, we established as goals: to understand the process of construction of the research, focusing on the methodology used;

to describe the types of research procedures as from the ideographic and nomothetic analysis; to interpret the dialogue of master degree and Doctorate students with the frame of reference, when giving support to their methodologies.

In the theoretical construction that is the basis for our understanding, we involved thinkers such as Martin Buber (2001), and the Brazilian researchers Maria Aparecida Viggiani Bicudo (2011), in the field of phenomenology, and Bernadete Angelina Gatti (2003), who offers contributions to the different branches of investigation, among others.

### 3 Method of analysis and the methodology

Understanding of the research phenomenon is expressed when we go-to-things-in-themselves, and thus, we speak about the investigation phenomenon as what is revealed in the movement of its perception, and in its description, analysis, reflection and interpretation. In this perspective, we express our understanding of that which is shown, in accordance with our researcher's inquiring eye. To achieve understanding of the process revealed in the theses and dissertations, we opted for the phenomenological method and the carrying out of a hermeneutic reading. According to Bicudo (2011), phenomenological research seeks to understand what a specific phenomenon means and how it is experienced, searching thus, for its meaning. In this hermeneutic analysis of the written texts, we focused on words and sentences spoken, and the manner of speaking in the context which is internal and external to the productions themselves.

In the phenomenological attitude adopted, we understand that the object is not understood as being in itself, or objectively given, but it is constituted by the subject in the intersubjectivity experienced in the world-life. Due to this, we interrogate him/her during the investigative process.

Having set out the temporal delimitation – 1999 to 2014 – and the research field – we developed the following stages: initially, we carried out a survey on the regional productions and their respective analysis sheets. The phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis movement consisted of two moments: the ideographic and the nomothetic. In the first, we analysed the individual structures of the phenomenon under interrogation to understand it, we described the research types and procedures and the theoretical support most used in the manuscripts. We read the descriptions developed on the analysis sheets, and we read them many times, with the purpose of understanding what had been said by the master's degree and doctorate students. Focused on the research interrogation guideline, we outlined the units of meaning – the methodology used in each Program and its frame of reference, the first action of the ideographic process.

In the second moment, the nomothetic, which interlaces with the first in the issue of time, we sought to transcend the individual discourse of each Program while exposing the private interpretations, going deeper in the direction of their articulations, revealing the understanding of the meanings and significances increasingly more far-reaching – and in this way, we attained the types and procedures that predominated in the productions concerning the teacher in the Mid-West, as well as the frame of reference that was their basis. We coordinated, thus, the establishing of great convergences constructed by the teams of the partner programs, which constitute a network of meanings of the phenomenon under focus – the academic productions concerning the teacher.

This network requires from us a meta-comprehension while researchers (Bicudo, 2011), in the direction of presenting the manner in which we understand the phenomenon, after the accomplishment of the investigative movement, in dialogue established among the interrogations put forward, the authors under study, the academic researchers' discourse and the registers developed by those integrating *Redecentro*. These convergences were interpreted, and, as we interlaced them with the researchers' writings, the wide-ranging ideas, and our understanding of the studied texts, we carried out a movement of theorization of what had been understood.

### 3.1 The revealing of the academic productions in the ideographic stage

For the understanding of the methodology used in the productions concerning the teacher, we searched for answers to our first query: how are the types of research revealed in the productions analysed by the different research teams?

We present, the distribution of the works according to the type of investigation. Our analysis focuses on the typology defined and expressed in the Analysis Sheet Model (Redecentro, 2012), which involves: ethnographic research; case study; research-action; documental research; survey; participant research; experimental research; oral historical research and historical research.

After reading the texts in whole, we observed that in the cut-out of the 77 productions under analysis, 37 of the them were of case studies, whether it be a course, a teacher, a class, a group of teachers, an educational institution.

Having its origin in sociological and anthropological research, to carry out this methodological option three epistemological assumptions should be considered, in accordance with Sanches Peres & Santos (2005): “knowledge appears as something in constant (re)construction; the case is a complex entirety, and not merely the sum of its constituting parts; reality can be understood as from various perspectives” (p. 6). These aspects may be interpreted in the description of the investigative process of the authors that chose them.

We considered as case studies the research papers in which at least three indicators defined in our Analysis Sheet Model (Redecentro, 2012) were revealed:

- i) The investigator starts from initial theoretical assumptions, keeping alert to new elements emerging in the study.
- ii) The understanding of the object is more complete when, during interpretation, it considers the context in which it is situated.
- iii) The researcher aims at revealing the multiplicity of dimensions present in the problem, focusing on it as a whole.
- iv) The data is collected at different moments, in diversified situations and with a plurality of types of informants.
- v) The researcher presents the various factors that justify the singularity of the case.
- vi) It has as its object a unit, that may be a group of people, an educational institution, a cultural fact, among others. (p. 20)

Relating to the predominance of one type of research in the educational institutions under investigation, the data was revealed as described follows. (Table 1).

**Table 1.**

*Research types revealed in the academic productions concerning the teacher in the Mid-West, Brazil, from 1999 to 2014.*

Research types	Frequency
Case Study	34
Case Study and Oral Historical	01
Case Study and Documental	02
Ethnographic type	09
Historical	08
Oral historical	07
Documental	02
Documental and Bibliographical	01
Documental and Historical	01

Documental and Formative Didactic Experiment	01
Participant	02
Research-Action	01
Survey	01
Experimental	—
Other types of research*	07
<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>

\*Note: Other types of research that were not part of our analysis.

The use of the case study reveals the greater focus on the indicators (Redecentro, 2012, p. 20) “the investigator starts from initial theoretical assumptions, keeping alert to new elements emerging in the study”; “the understanding of the object is more complete when, during interpretation, it takes into account the context in which it is situated”; “it has as its object a unit, that may be a group of people, an educational institution, a cultural fact, among others” (10). Apart from the indicators referring to the theoretical fundamentals and to the definition of the unit of analysis, we highlight that the data was collected at different moments, in diversified situations and with a plurality of types of informants (10). We emphasize that all the indicators were revealed in the theses and dissertations that took on this methodologic pathway and that, quantitatively, we came upon them very frequently, which indicates a feeling of methodological trust of the authors.

The type of study most used is coherent with the subject matter of our interinstitutional study – the teacher – in his/her development, identity, professional socialization, unionization, collective actions, and teaching practises. The various pathways of investigation converged to a deepening of the singularity of being a teacher.

In a smaller amount, but still inside a reasonable frequency of work, we noted the studies of the ethnographic research (9), the historical research (8) and the documental research (7). In the ethnographic research, the authors carried out field work of long-term immersion, which implies in direct contact with the investigated subjects, searching for the meaning that they attribute to what is being researched, confirmed in the primary data which is produced by the informants. In this study typology, we observed as well, that these investigations are carried out by means of a combination of procedures such as observation, interviews, videos narratives, photographs, among others, analysed in triangulation, as also happens in the case studies.

We also noticed that the oral historical research (7) is used in specific variants, involving, in the different productions, the thematic stories and life stories. The first variant focuses on a specific period, situation, or specific theme. The life-stories refer to experiences gone through by the subject under research, when he/she evokes memories or speaks about significant events in his/her life, or of a group to which he/she belongs, using oral or written language.

Historical Research, which uses written and/or spoken documents which refer to the researched theme and carries out descriptions and critical analyses of the facts, was most used for studies of precise temporal cut-offs.

With higher incidence alongside other types of research, the documental research was most used with the case study, the bibliographical research, the historical research, and the emergent formative didactic experiment, and was present in all the programs.

We highlight the absence of experimental research, originating from investigative models in which to observe, to measure and to control, predominated as a criterion for scientific character. We observed that the academics have withdrawn from studies in which interference in the circumstances is direct in pre-established conditions, control is strict, and objectivity is a must. This classical type of research has been substituted by the qualitative works.

Another modality which was shown as less frequent was that of the type survey, intended for research on a large scale, that has as its main purpose to identify the factors that determine or contribute to the occurrence of certain phenomena, characterizing itself, moreover, as of quantitative approach. The difficulties in carrying out this type of research in post-graduate courses in a short period of time, allied to the tendency for the qualitative approach, which is very present in the academy, may explain this reduced number of works. Considering that these studies produce a type of knowledge that will lead to the acquaintance of other dimensions of a certain issue, we ponder on the fact if these modalities are really unnecessary in our current times. We do not desire here, to simply propose a return to the classical models. We only put forward the issue.

Early adhesion to these two modalities is aligned with the predominance of the qualitative approach (87%) in the investigative process of the Mid-West, which shows principles and forms of performance that move away from the positivist influence in research in exact and natural sciences; this used experimentation widely in the investigations carried out, and had a significant adhesion in the educational field in past decades, just as the survey had a great repercussion in the 1980s and 1990s. Would this change contribute to the development of knowledge in the educational field? Our results are not yet sufficient to interpret this methodological datum.

Research-action and Participant research were equally not very expressives. Dialogues between day-to-day practice and academic investigation did not motivate the researchers. Once more, the duration of the post-graduate courses may be an inhibitor. The post-graduate student would need to use research techniques to support an action and improve the practice and stay for a long time in the research field. Another factor may be the influence of investigation focusing on individual interests, or distant from the needs of the subjects, warding off the researchers from solidary proposals of networks of knowledge and of transforming actions (Abreu-Bernardes, 2018). But it is clear that, as with the choice of the theme, the methodological choice also depends on various factors.

As we continue to interrogate our study object – understood as the phenomenon that will be revealed, as from repeated reading of the analysis sheets, and returning various times to the original theses and dissertations, we moved on to another question: while defining the type of research, which procedures were selected to achieve the purposes of the master and doctoral researches?

In the methodology in which the authors sought to listen to the other for the construction of knowledge, we highlight the interview (53), the questionnaire (33) and observation (27). These are studies that basically aim at, listening to opinions, representations, conceptions, and points of view of the informants. The research procedures used are presented in Table 2.



**Table 2.**

***Research Procedures Revealed in the Academic Productions Concerning the Teacher in the Mid-West, Brazil, from 1999 to 2014.***

<b>Research procedures</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Interview	5
Questionnaire	3
Observation	2
Document Analysis	3
Narrative	1
Interview and Document Analysis	20
Interview, Questionnaire and Observation	12
Narrative and Observation	13
Interview, Questionnaire and Document Analysis	16
Narrative and Questionnaire	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>

In the document analysis (39), which is the second option of the researchers, the studies carried out analyses of proposals, legislation, minutes, reports and policies, which can be considered historical in one sense and documental in another. Thus, not only those that carried out historical research resorted to documental research, but also those that chose other types of research in which they seek to broaden the understanding of phenomena in which this understanding needs historical and sociocultural contextualization.

The Mid-West researchers, consistent with the types of research they chose, carried out their studies prioritizing the convergence of various procedures, and in many cases, carrying out data triangulation. In general, the interview was associated to the questionnaire, to the documental analysis and to observation. Of the 77 productions, only 14 opted for one only procedure, thus: questionnaire (3); observation (2); interview (5); narrative (1) and document analysis (3).

Concerning these options in the investigative process,

we rejected the idea that the choice of a methodology is exclusively the work of individual actions, and that these actions are explained in the rationality of the researcher-subjects. The development of ideas is dependent on the production context. [...]. Thus, the post-graduate student makes his/her choice, while located in a field with values, facts, objects, tensions, disputes and specific interests, which at university are understood as the tutor's research line, existing research groups, field of concentration, bibliography to which he/she is presented and new experiences in events and in the Program itself (Abreu-Bernardes, Silva & Silva, 2012, p. 113).

To this academic context we can add the appeals of the post-graduate student's place of work, normally in a school, in which he/she recognizes the shortfalls, the requests, and the demands.

Pursuing in our attitude of interrogating the productions, we asked: how did the researchers support their methodological choices?

The authors that were most mentioned in the theses and dissertations under analyses were: Marli Eliza Dalmázio André, quoted in 40 productions, carries out studies and research in the fields of teacher development and research methodology in educational research. Hermengarda Alves Lüdke (Menga Lüdke), quoted in 37 papers, is a professor with extensive and significant production

about research in education and teacher development. For decades, the two professors write about the investigative process. They are the most consulted authors of the Mid-West researchers. Other researchers also quoted were Robert Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen (18); Fernando Luís González Rey (08) and Bernadete Angelina Gatti (08), also with numerous publications about research in education. All of them are contemporary authors.

What does the choice of authors and reference frames reveal to us? The works that were the support for the Mid-West researchers, mostly discuss more how to do research, its phases, and scientific characteristics, than relate studies carried out or reflect more deeply about the investigative process. This does not take away the merit of great names in the academic world, but the works in demand express the search for manuals by the master and doctorate students. We thought that analysis of the research, carried out by these authors, could contribute more to those who are in doubt concerning the methodological process.

In the researchers' options, we also observed a possible welcoming of the characteristics of American research, in a direct manner, as is the case of Robert Bogdan, who frequented University of Maine, and was a professor at Syracuse University, and Sari Knopp Biklen, professor at Syracuse University. And, an indirect influence, we may eventually attribute to Menga Lüdke, with post-doctorate at University of California; Marli André, a doctor in Education Psychology by the University of Illinois, and Bernadette Gatti, with a post-doctorate taken at Pennsylvania State University.

The most recurring (27) work was "Research in Education: qualitative approaches", written in 1986 by Menga Lüdke and Marli André. In this book, starting from two master degree dissertation experiences, the authors raise queries and discuss the qualitative research, and comment the participant or participative, or, still, the emancipating research, the research-action, the ethnographic research, and the case study. Apart from this, they refer to the procedures of observation, interview, and documental analysis. Thus, they give a panoramic view of qualitative research.

What is there in this text of past decades, that attracts the Mid-West researchers so much? We thought that in it, the post-graduate students of the Mid-Wet could be finding answers, or, at least, methodological indications, which they cannot find in more current bibliography. Another reason may be the considerable number of quotes of this specific publication in dissertations and theses right from its publication, which confers to it, recognition. We also observed that various other more contemporary texts written by the same authors are used, but far from the same incidence.

In the 77 productions analysed, there were quotes from 112 authors, in publications that were repeated or not. This may indicate a type of theoretical dispersion, as signalled by Warde (1993). We highlight also that 09 productions did not register the theoretical framework used, which undermines the strictness and scientific criteria.

### **3.2 The nomothetic stage**

We understand that academic papers that express the construction of knowledge does not end. It is interrupted at a certain moment of the process. Because of this, we do not reach a conclusion, but we stop, to think about what has been revealed in our studies.

We have interlaced the writings of the researchers, wide-ranging ideas, and our understanding of the manuscripts under analysis. After this, we carried out a theorization of what was understood, in the nomothetic stage of our study. Thus, we pondered on the fact that the researchers' option when prioritizing the case study in their choices concerning the teachers in the Mid-West, and in it carried out studies that involved interviews, questionnaires, observation, chose

to listen to the other, search for utterances, looking for learning to construct their knowledge in the various themes investigated, favouring alterity and dialogue.

In this reflection, we work on Buber's assumption: the human person is a being of relations, a being of relationships. Martin Buber is called the thinker of human relations. For him, man can only make himself human in coexistence with other men. The Austrian philosopher expresses this dialogic ideology, especially, in the poem I-Thou (Buber, 2001), recognized as the most important of his works. For this philosopher, who dialogues with phenomenology, "The I is fulfilled in the relation with the Thou; while becoming I, I can say Thou. [...] The relation is reciprocity; my Thou works on me just as I work on it" (Buber, 2001, p. 13, 18). To this thought, we add that, for Buber, the answer is indispensable in the relation. The experience of answering the word is the heart of the between, or the experienced reciprocity. The answer establishes dialogue, the inter-action.

In Buber's perspective, the researcher holds a comprehensive understanding of the other, and as an individual engaged in dialogue, he experiments the double meaning of his consciousness of self, at the same time as he perceives in the other his natural condition. This encounter is the experience of the inter-human, the essential alterity that marks a relationship. The human being, as a being of relations that only recognises him/herself in the essential encounter with order, and with whom he/she experiences a mutuality, has in dialogue his/her fundamental attitude (Adapted from Santiago, 2008, p. 9).

The investigative attitude revealed in the academic productions, in which the search for the other is carried out by means of dialogue, of encounter, expresses also, the recognition of subjectivity and intersubjectivity as essential for scientific investigation, as well as allowing for descriptions and interpretations of the theme under study by means of dialogue (Abreu-Bernardes, 2018).

Research types and procedures should not be, under Buber's perspective, mere modalities for the gathering of information. They are discursive practices, and as such, need to be understood as a dialogic process. The narrative of one of the researchers clarifies our reflection.

We opted for giving voice to those who have an extensive experience that may favour a reading of realities and pathways in teaching, with the intention of provoking a reflection among the participants, and perhaps, changes concerning their practices. What interested us, was, exactly, to have been able to recuperate and to listen to their experiences and the meanings that they attribute to the manner of building the teacher-being, at the same time in which they resumed their pathways and thought about its contents and personal and professional meanings (Analysis Sheet 13, 2016. p. 21).

Listening to the other, we can prioritize the real demands of the subjects involved, propose the desired actions and changes to the investigated subjects, construct and reconstruct knowledge which before was only focusing on the interests of the researcher. According to Brandão and Streck (2006), the act of researching should be understood as a set of experiences of collective creation of knowledge, focusing on the surpassing of the opposition subject-object in the processes that produce knowledge.

#### **4 Final Words**

Looking back on the results obtained, we think that there are some considerations that can be made concerning the next steps of this investigation. We observed that research types and procedures that were not part of our field of studies, were shown in the readings of the papers. Thus, we listed some types that arise in the new theses and dissertations: bibliographical research; intervention research; collaborative research; discourse analysis; research of exploratory character; formative didactic experiment and social representations.

Among the procedures, we catalogued: discourse analysis, analysis of newspaper cuttings from the period; data analysis by means of Evoc software; the appliance of tests; completing phrases; constitution of a study group; creation of stories and drawings; reports; free recalling of words; diagnostic sheet; audio tapes; study groups; workshop groups; discussion groups; hermeneutic reading; written manifestation; educative memories; interrogation techniques and field work. All of them repeat the original writing in which they were found in the academic texts.

There are methodologies that arise and defy us. This movement is enriching for research in education, but we highlight the fact that do adhere to new methodological itineraries, considered more adequate to the demands for a greater understanding of reality, does not means to use other types of procedures, but to modify attitudes and cognitive perspectives.

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