

THE USE OF COLLECTIVE SUBJECT DISCOURSE AS A METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL: PERCEPTION OF TEACHERS ABOUT INNOVATION IN EDUCATION

O USO DO DISCURSO DO SUJEITO COLETIVO COMO PROPOSTA METODOLÓGICA: A PERCEPÇÃO DE PROFESSORES SOBRE INOVAÇÃO NA EDUCAÇÃO

EL USO DEL DISCURSO DEL SUJETO COLECTIVO COMO PROPUESTA METODOLÓGICA: LA PERCEPCIÓN DE LOS PROFESORES SOBRE INNOVACIÓN EN EDUCACIÓN

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ABSTRACT: It introduces the perception of teachers about the concept of innovation. From a questionnaire applied to 20 teachers, who, at the time of the research, were master's or doctoral students, the data were analyzed in the light of the Collective Subject Discourse (CSD). Six categories emerged regarding the concept of innovation: as something new, as improvement of an existing product or process, as a benefit, as a need, and as the use of new technologies; and one regarding their use, named application. For each category, a synthesis speech was generated, representing the collective understanding of innovation in education. The perception of teachers is heterogeneous, but it is in line with different perspectives discussed in literature. CSD is an applicable methodology for qualitative studies and, therefore, it can be used by the field of Education when the intention is to give voice to a group of individuals about a certain topic.

KEYWORDS: Innovation. Education. Teachers. Collective Subject Discourse.

RESUMO: *Esse estudo apresenta a percepção de professores sobre o conceito de inovação. A partir de um questionário aplicado a 20 professores, que no momento da pesquisa eram mestrandos ou doutorandos, os dados foram analisados sob a luz do Discurso do Sujeito Coletivo (DSC). Seis categorias emergiram a respeito do conceito de inovação: como algo novo, como melhoria de um produto ou processo existente, como benefício, como necessidade, e como uso de novas tecnologias; e uma em relação a seu uso, nomeada aplicação. Para cada categoria foi gerado o discurso síntese, representando o entendimento do coletivo sobre inovação na educação. A percepção dos professores é heterogênea, no entanto, se alinha a*

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diferentes perspectivas discutidas na literatura. O DSC é uma metodologia aplicável para estudos qualitativos e, portanto, pode ser apropriada pelo campo da Educação quando o intuito for dar voz a um coletivo de sujeitos sobre determinado tema.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Inovação. Educação. Professores. Discurso do Sujeito Coletivo.*

RESUMEN: *Este estudio presenta la percepción de los profesores sobre el concepto de innovación. A partir de un cuestionario aplicado a 20 profesores, que en el momento de la investigación eran estudiantes de maestría o doctorado, los datos fueron analizados a la luz del Discurso del Sujeto Colectivo (DSC). Surgieron seis categorías con respecto al concepto de innovación: como algo nuevo, como una mejora de un producto o proceso existente, como un beneficio, como una necesidad y como el uso de nuevas tecnologías; y uno con respecto a su uso, nombrada aplicación. Para cada categoría, se generó el discurso de síntesis, que representa la comprensión colectiva de la innovación en educación. La percepción de los profesores es heterogénea, pero, sin embargo, está en línea con las diferentes perspectivas discutidas en la literatura. El DSC es una metodología aplicable a los estudios cualitativos y, por tanto, puede ser apropiado por el campo de la Educación cuando la intención es dar voz a un grupo de sujetos sobre una determinada temática.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Innovación. Educación. Profesores. Discurso del Sujeto Colectivo.*

Introduction

Although the Brazilian scientific literature has given strong emphasis to innovation in education in the last two decades, this theme is not necessarily new in the country. According to Oliveira (2021), innovation was addressed in a pioneering way with the New School movement, being strengthened from the 1960s on. Bertero (1979) already discussed in the late 1970's how to appropriate the theoretical models used by administration and apply them to Education, even if partially, since such models did not meet the needs of institutions focused on health, education, and other public agencies. Although other works, especially books, were published in the early 1980s on the topic, there is no well-defined theoretical framework in the literature to guide the research developed towards innovation in Education (TAVARES, 2019).

A review conducted with papers published between 1975 and 2017 pointed out that the term innovation is widely used in the field of Education, having, however, no explicitness of its meaning. The same study also highlighted that there are different denominations that encompass innovation in education, which indicates a pulverization of terminology in the literature of the area, evidencing a lack of consensus (TAVARES, 2019).

The purpose of the present research was, then, to use the Collective Subject Discourse (CSD) as a methodological proposal to investigate, from the speech of educators/postgraduate

students, if there is a consensus regarding the concept of innovation, or if what happens in the literature is also repeated in this speech. It is assumed that

The most successful experiences of educational innovation consider and give importance to educators as actors in the process of change. They should be valued and listened to, being able to exercise their decision-making and choice capacity in the processes (NOGARO; BATTESTIN, 2016, p. 366).

The CSD, in this context, is configured as a methodology that allows expressing the subjectivities that mark the daily life of the studied subjects and, at the same time, materializes the collective thought about a certain phenomenon, in this case, the conception of innovation in Education.

Theoretical background

The discussion about innovation is very present when it comes to production processes, especially when linked to the advancement and acceleration in the development of technologies and their association with competitiveness. According to Carvalho, Reis and Cavalcante (2011), although each has its role, innovation is not dissociated from science and technology, because together these concepts complement each other. Thus, innovation is seen not only as an opportunity, but also as a necessity.

For Lemos (2000), innovations can be classified into two categories: radical and incremental. The first relates to the introduction of a new product or process, in a way that represents a rupture with what was established until then, and is linked to the conception of innovation as something new. The second, on the other hand, is related to improvement.

The conception of innovation as the creation of something new also appears in the very semantics of the word, with "origin in the Latin, *innovatio*, meaning renewal; [...] the prefix in found in the beginning of the word assumes the function of entrance, that is, something new should happen, something that was not done before, that is, a novelty". (NOGARO; BATTESTIN, 2016, p. 360, emphasis added).

Although the link between innovation and the conception of something totally new is strong, Carvalho, Reis and Cavalcante (2011, p. 34) clarify that

Most innovations arise from a significant improvement in something already existing, adding advantage without changing the reference standard. Incremental innovation of a product occurs when there is significant improvement or refinement, through the addition or replacement of new

materials that make it easier to use, more ergonomic and practical. Similarly, process incremental innovation occurs when there are significant improvements in a process resulting in a notably superior performance in relation to the existing one.

For Messina (2001, p. 226), the concept of innovation was employed over the years as a synonym for improving things, however, this concept has been transforming and "[...] currently innovation is something open, capable of adopting multiple forms and meanings, associated with the context in which it is inserted. Its application can happen in various areas, such as products, services, processes, marketing and organizational (CARVALHO; REIS; CAVALCANTE, 2011).

Although with more emphasis on economics and administration, the discussion about innovation also goes through the field of Education when it presents itself as one of the links that make up the innovation systems, especially related to educational institutions, as stated by Cassiolato and Lastres (2000, p. 247-248):

An innovation system can be defined as a set of distinct institutions that jointly and individually contribute to the development and diffusion of technologies. This notion therefore involves not only companies, but primarily educational and research institutions, funding institutions, government, etc.

The authors point out that in Latin America, and even more so in Brazil, it was the public universities that played an important role in the innovation system, mainly by being responsible for the development of specialized human resources. This public is the one that will act both in industry and in all other spaces of society, including the educational institutions themselves, whether at a basic or higher level.

According to Moran (2004, p. 237),

An innovative education presupposes developing a set of proposals with some major axes that integrate, complement, and combine: focus on learning, development of self-esteem/self-knowledge, training of the student as an entrepreneur and of the student as a citizen.

The author points out that technology can help achieve these goals, and that just defining new ways of teaching and learning is not enough, it is necessary to understand society the way it is, complex. For Rocha, Fiscarelli, and Rodrigues (2020, p. 271), "education is out of sync with the sociocultural transformations arising from the knowledge and information age," which are fast and include both actors who were born in the digital age and those who have lived

through its transformation, establishing different relationships with knowledge and the production of knowledge.

Thus, in the area of education, from a dialectical perspective, innovating is more than introducing novelties or changes. It implies replacing something with something new, but with emancipatory purposes linked to social transformation in mind. Hence the statement that, from this perspective, innovating in education is characterized, strictly speaking, as renewing, reinventing, since transforming in the direction, therefore, of a social quality education (OLIVEIRA, 2021, p. 180).

One of the key elements that always appears in the literature when talking about innovative education is the figure of the teacher. As a central element in the teaching and learning process, the teacher is often placed as the agent of change responsible for bringing the new to the classroom. For Harres *et al.* (2018, p. 16-17),

The innovative teacher is a restless, curious individual who accepts challenges that discourage him. They are propositional, create teaching situations, test activities, and when applying them, reflect on the results obtained, in a constant process of self-evaluation. He is also predisposed to engage in activities that provide an examination of his actions as a teacher.

For the authors, constant reflection by teachers on their practice helps in innovative education by allowing the break from mechanical actions. At the same time, it involves professionals in situations, often collective, that allow experimenting with networks and groups that decentralize their function and culminate in learning processes of all for one, one for all, and all for all, involving students, parents, and co-workers. In this way, as it involves teachers, innovation also appears as a resource against transmissive teaching.

The application of innovations in education, be it basic or higher education, is not a homogeneous process. For Costa (2018, p. 175), "perhaps of all the regulatory functions of society, the one that has changed the least is education. We prepare students for standardized, repetitive work, in which order and discipline are mandatory." This represents a challenge for the so-called Information Society, in which work is no longer standardized, nor repetitive. Today we live in a world in which the ability to solve complex problems is fundamental, and, for this, creativity, collaboration, and innovation are more effective than order, discipline, and tradition.

Vidal and Rocha Neto (2016, p. 268) start from the idea that to meet the demands of society, there is a need for an educational reform that involves "[...] flexibility in the curriculum, in the pedagogical proposal, in the evaluation methods, in the organizational structure, and

especially in the professionalization of the teacher, as an active and innovative agent," accounting for the rapid changes that occur in the world and training autonomous subjects who value the construction of knowledge.

Innovation also cannot be dissociated from the context in which it is inserted, with all the contemporary challenges that demand it. Contradictions, disputes, and social transformations reflect directly on the more or less innovative character of the different areas of Education. This has become more evident today with the changes brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic and its impacts on educational practices in different spheres of education.

From the social distance required due to the pandemic, the use of information and communication technologies has shown itself as an alternative for the continuation of teaching, in the remote modality. Oliveira (2021, p. 184) highlights that "[...] the remarkable presence of these technologies in the teaching work and in school education, in general, has stood out as a methodological alternative considered innovative in the educational area". The author, however, calls attention to the fact that we must perceive not only the positive character of this reality, as an innovation in pedagogical practices and resources, but also the challenges it imposes, such as the precariousness of the teaching work and the accentuation of social inequalities.

When dealing with innovation, it is necessary to evaluate the nature of the changes, not disassociating it from the social context and the reality that surrounds it. In different scenarios, including the most recent one related to the pandemic, the innovative character will present different positive and negative aspects to all the players involved, whether they are teachers, students, management team, parents, and the community in general. Add to this the polysemic character of the word itself and there is evidence of the need for deeper discussions on the subject and its treatment in the field of Education, with theoretical and practical reflections.

Theoretical and methodological options

This is a research of applied nature, characterized as exploratory and with qualitative approach, with ways to contextualize the phenomenon studied, in which the Collective Subject Discourse (CSD) was used, a methodology used to address data collected through opinion polls or open questions and that allows to describe the subjective representation of a particular phenomenon existing in collective thinking.

CSD seeks to make feasible "the task of researching social ways of thinking" (LEFÉVRE, 2017, p. 10) by reconstituting the thinking of a tribe on a given topic from

individual statements, generating social representations of a collective. Thus, CSD is "[...] an explicit proposal for reconstituting a collective, opinionated empirical being or entity in the form of a subject of discourse issued in the first person singular" (LEFEVRE; LEFEVRE, 2006, p. 519).

Its way of presenting social representations allows individual expressions to be grouped into synthesized discourses, into semantic categories with similar meanings (LEFÉVRE, 2017). In this sense, the source of information used are the people themselves belonging to the group.

For the present study, it was used a questionnaire prepared through Google Forms containing open questions with the purpose of collecting testimonials from the research participants in a spontaneous and voluntary way. The instrument was applied to 22 master's and doctoral students from a graduate program in October 2015. The research corpus considered 20 respondents, because they act as teachers in basic education or higher education, the focus of this study.

Among the participants, 11 (55%) are female and nine (45%) are male. In relation to employment status, the respondents are predominantly enrolled in Master's programs (75%). As for professional performance, 13 (65%) participants are basic education teachers, and seven (35%) are higher education teachers.

After the first stage, of obtaining the statements, we proceeded to discourse reduction. In this second step, each statement is analyzed individually and the most relevant excerpts, which answer the question asked, are selected, resulting in key expressions (KE). For the CSD,

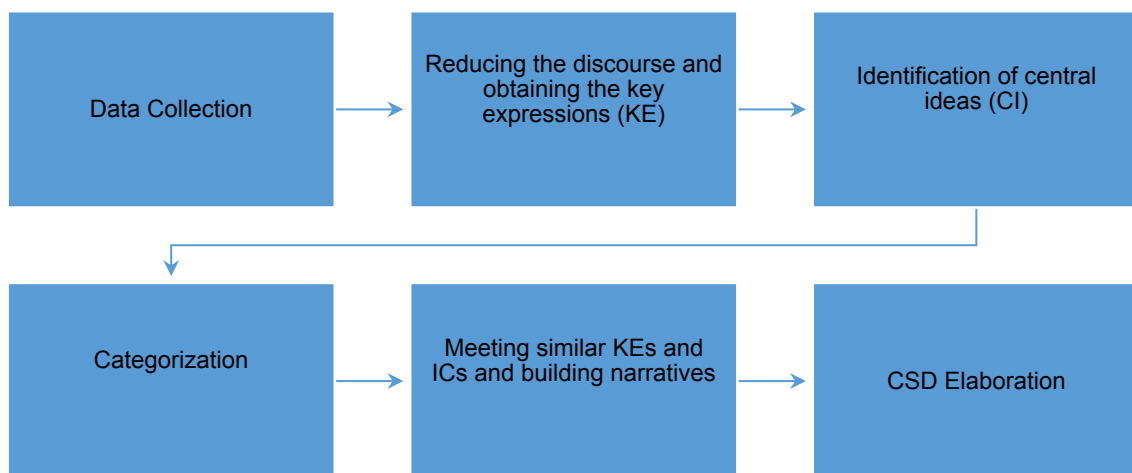
[...] it is important to understand that the selection of CEs [...] is fundamental, because what one wishes to obtain, in the end, is the contribution of each individual to the thought of a collectivity and not the detailed thought of an individual [...] (LEFÉVRE, 2017, p. 32). After selecting the excerpts with CE, we proceeded to the search for meaning. This third step seeks to identify central ideas (CI), and at this point it is possible to use words that have not appeared in the text.

In the fourth stage the categorization was carried out, gathering the statements that present similar ideas into categories with names assigned by the researchers in order to express the common meaning. To minimize the risk of bias and individual subjectivity, this step was done separately by two of the researchers, with the results being compared until a common consensus was reached.

After the definition of the categories by induction, we proceeded to the fifth stage, the construction of the CSD from the meeting of the CE with similar CI, grouping the contents with similar meanings in their categories and building the narratives in the first person singular.

Figure 1 illustrates the stages of data treatment and the elaboration of the CSD, used, in this sense, to identify, among a set of individuals, which are the similar thoughts about innovation in Education, thus seeking to give active voice to the collective of teachers.

Figure 1 – Research Stages



Source: Prepared by the authors

Presentation and discussion of results

From the analysis of the teachers' answers and application of the CSD, it was possible to identify six central categories that represent the understanding of this audience in relation to innovation. For this group, innovation is understood as something new (28%), as improving an existing product or process (28%), as a benefit (20%), as a need (8%), and as the use of new technologies (4%). A category also emerged from the data analysis that is not related to the definition of innovation itself, but rather to its application (12%). Graph 1 illustrates the distribution of discourse fragments, i.e. the quantity of key expressions (KE) extracted from the participants' answers within each category.

Graph 1 – Quantities of speech fragments per category⁴



Source: Prepared by the authors

Innovation as something new was one of the categories with the highest predominance of central ideas. From the analysis of the key expressions, it was possible to elaborate the following discourse synthesis:

Innovation reminds me of something new, a new proposal that achieves new results. It is the need to create something new, a new idea, to create novel objects and utensils, the creation of something new that has not been used or seen before, the introduction of something new in any human activity. To innovate is to create, it is the search for novelty, a novelty in relation to something. It is the search for different paths or strategies, the creation of different strategies and new ways to travel the same path, to reach a certain goal.

This collective representation of several individuals exemplifies one of the conceptualizations brought by the literature, which presents innovation as something radical, which demonstrates a rupture with some pre-established standard and introduces something new (LEMOS, 2000).

Cassiolato and Lastres (2000), remind us that often the introduction of something new is associated with technological innovation only, however, what happens is that this process happens equally in all sectors, including the more traditional ones.

⁴ Aplicação = Application; Inovação como uso de novas tecnologias = Innovation as the use of new Technologies; Inovação como necessidade = Innovation as a necessity; Inovação como benefício = Innovation as a benefit; Inovação como melhoria de um produto ou processo existente = Innovation as improvement of an existing product or process; Inovação como algo novo = Innovation as something new; CATEGORIAS = CATEGORIES; FRAGMENTO DE DISCURSO = SPEECH FRAGMENT

The teachers' discourse in relation to novelty, creation, innovation as something new or a new way also appears in the literature. Nogaró and Battestin (2016, p. 361) defend innovation as "[...] any and all ways of thinking, creating, and using our knowledge, methods, techniques, and tools that lead to differentiated practices or behaviors." For the area of education, the authors reflect that, although innovation appears recurrently with this aspect of novelty, often the new has no place, because a position of comfortable conservatism is maintained, and that it is necessary to rethink and question practice in order to actually find room for new ways of innovating.

Besides innovation as something new, another category with similar predominance in the amount of representative fragments was innovation as an improvement of an existing product or process, as the summary speech shows:

By innovative I mean that it doesn't have to be something new, but simple and creative ideas to improve something that already exists. Innovation is not only about creating new tools, but also about changing methods and processes, including educational ones. It can be improvement. It is about change, innovation involving significant improvements, when you take existing proposals and readapt them to new needs. Innovation is finding solutions to small or large problems by changing old habits. It is the modification of the way of doing a certain task, the proposal of a new way of doing something that was already being done, but in an improved way. Innovation is an action in order to renew a process, it is all about improvement. It is to see new possibilities from the practices already done, it is the action of what is known together with new ways of passing on this knowledge. I believe that to innovate is to progress, it is evolution.

Teachers understand that innovation is not only what is new, but also the implementation of improvements to something already existing. This is the incremental nature of innovation, which despite often being imperceptible, can generate a "growth in technical efficiency, increased productivity, cost reduction, increased quality, and changes that enable the expansion of applications of a product or process" (LEMOS, 2000, p. 159).

Innovation as improvement, in education, is always done in an intentional and deliberate way (CARDOSO, 1997). In the teachers' discourse, this becomes evident when the collective points to change, improvement, and adaptation. These actions can only be taken from the moment an opportunity or a need that something can be improved is recognized, and, therefore, they proceed to a conscious process of innovation. For Messina (2001, p. 230), "change relates to its own management, to a way of controlling its effects with a view to improving education."

The third way in which innovation is perceived, not with the same intensity as the previous categories, but also standing out, is as a benefit. It is worth noting that during the

analysis of the text fragments generated from the teachers' answers, no indications were identified that innovation could have any negative aspect, quite the contrary, the discourse moves in the direction of highlighting innovation as something advantageous, which brings benefits to society and to individuals themselves.

Innovation is something innovative that can help the individual in some daily activity (school or not), it is adding value and being competitive. Innovation, when executed, generates benefits for society (or for a part of it), such as savings in resources or improvements in the processes involved. It is an improvement created to make man's life easier, capable of generating advantages. Innovation is an activity that previously could not be performed, or was performed in a less effective way, such as making the visualization of graphics more dynamic, to facilitate information.

Innovation can also be represented **as a necessity**, as signaled by the discourse synthesis of this category:

Innovation is nothing more than adapting to new situations, usually to transcend and overcome the sameness; it is abandoning practices that are already giving little or no results and constantly changing according to the demand for work and information.

The collective understands that innovation as a need is nothing more than to accompany the changes that society goes through and that reflect in the life and work of all individuals. Thus, "the need for innovation arises as a natural response to a scenario of constant changes and transformations in knowledge" (NOGARO; BATTESTIN, 2016, p. 362).

In this context, one must reflect on the fact that innovation is perhaps being understood as reactive, that is, only as a way to react to the different demands imposed by reality. If this is the case, innovation takes on a compulsory posture, and not as an action to be proactively pursued in order to anticipate possibilities.

Finally, still within the presentation of the speeches that emerged from the analytical categories and that are related to the definition, innovation appears as the **use of new technologies**:

Innovation corresponds to the act of bringing or presenting an instrument or method from which it will be possible to perform a certain function. In education, it is the use of available technologies in order to facilitate the teaching-learning process.

This association, as explained by Nogaro and Battestin (2016), is quite common, since the technological area is one of the most prominent when it comes to innovation, especially because this sector has the need to remain active in the production chain, operating under the

logic of the market. Even so, only 4% of the central ideas of the teachers' speeches represent this link, which shows that, although it exists, it does not influence the collective in a significant way, unlike the definitions presented above, which are more expressive.

Although the triggering question of the questionnaire applied to teachers was related to understanding what this collective understands by innovation, **the issue of application** in activities, processes, products, and techniques also emerged, as can be observed in the following speech synthesis:

Innovation allows you to solve an existing problem, by using software or an experiment to teach functions, for example, you are innovating your functions class. Innovation can occur in classes, products, ideas, in relation to a technology, a teaching method, an organizational method in a company, a medical procedure, the manufacture of a product or equipment, a sports technique, an agricultural technique, in a given knowledge, technique or object for a given context, whether it is in work, education, culture or leisure.

From the speeches constructed and analyzed, it is possible to observe that innovation is perceived from a positive viewpoint, even if at some point it happens as a necessity. The teachers understand that innovation is not restricted to the technological or industrial area and can happen in all sectors of society, including education, with more or less robust applications.

Final remarks

The study made it possible to understand the perception of innovation from the discourse of teachers of basic education and higher education, while postgraduate students at master's and doctoral levels. The results showed that there is no consensus regarding the definition of innovation and explicitness of its meaning, which confirms a pulverization of understandings as portrayed in the literature. The research carried out here demonstrates that, although the speeches were generated with teachers coming from two different educational modalities, they represent the same collective.

From the Collective Subject Discourse methodology, five categories of definition of innovation were perceived (as something new; as improvement of an existing product or process; as a benefit; as a need; and as the use of new technologies) and one category that refers to the application of innovation. The most expressive categories indicate that the teachers' understanding is that innovation is perceived as something that can result either from a rupture with a pre-existing standard or from the improvement of this standard.

Even if innovation is more related to the business sector and has been shown in a heterogeneous way in the analyzed data, the teachers' perception about it shows a knowledge that goes beyond competitiveness, the simple use of a technology or differentiated pedagogical practice, which contributes to highlight an alignment of innovation as a dynamic and social process.

From a methodological point of view, the CSD has shown itself to be a possibility of application in research in the field of Education that aims to bring to light the social representations of certain groups and collectives, from the collection of individual statements. As a resource for qualitative studies involving people, it is an investigation methodology that can materialize these social representations and studied phenomena, allowing the methodological organization of the research and resulting in a collective product, which may have relevant applications in the field of Education in its different studied themes.

As future research, we suggest applying similar research to student teachers from other graduate programs, in order to understand if the CSD generated in these groups is similar to the one found in the present study. As for innovation itself, it is pertinent to deepen teachers' understanding of the concept applied to education beyond the theoretical sphere, that is, by studying how they innovate in their daily practices or how they perceive innovation in their own work spaces, in order to compare whether the definitions presented are in fact a portrait of reality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: The authors would like to thank the UNIEDU/FUMDES Program - Graduate of the State of Santa Catarina, for funding.

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How to reference this article

GULKA, J. A.; CANTO, F.; LUCAS, E. R. O. The use of Collective Subject Discourse as a methodological proposal: Perception of teachers about innovation in education. **Revista on line de Política e Gestão Educacional**, Araraquara, v. 26, n. 00, e022021, Jan./Dec. 2022. e-ISSN:1519-9029. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22633/rpge.v26i00.15754>

Submitted: 05/11/2021

Revisions required: 26/12/2021

Approved: 25/02/2022

Published: 31/03/2022

Management of translations and versions: Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação