

Schools2030 Global Research Partner Report

Action Research and Equity: Effects on Innovative School Environments

The School of Education at the University of
São Paulo (FEUSP)

Mid-Term Dissemination Brief
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RESEARCH DISSEMINATION BRIEF

PROJECT SUMMARY

This research aims to present evidence-based solutions for promoting equity in education, specifically in the field of human-centered design and similar action research approaches. The project addresses the following problem: **do action research processes in innovative schools participating in the Schools2030 programme in Brazil generate more equitable effects concerning gender, ethnicity, and disabilities among students?** The specialised literature does not provide abundant information regarding the impact of action research in tackling inequalities within schools, an aspect to which this project intends to contribute. The research will follow two complementary workstreams. The first includes a systematic review of global studies on action research in schools to infer what the quantitative and qualitative evidence tells us about the impact of action research on educational equity. The second workstream employs an action research approach to produce primary data through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with students and professionals from approximately 70 schools participating in Schools2030 in Brazil, covering all age groups (5, 10, and 15) and regions from the country. For the production of primary data, we will also carry out five case studies in schools, using the participant observation approach. These results will shed light on the hypothesis that action research processes are associated with changes in the school environment in favour of equitable relations amongst students of different **genders, ethnicities and for those with disabilities**. The knowledge produced will be informative for educational leaders in the field of teacher training. The project aims to answer the following research questions:

- How does the action research approach impact teacher training in favour of educational equity?
- What does the best available evidence tell us about the relationship between action research and educational equity?
- Is the impact of the action research approach felt differently by different students?
- Does action research help teachers to identify and support learner variability and learning differences?
- Are there particular aspects of action research approaches (for example community engagement or play-based learning methods) that are shown to have a positive impact on educational equity?
- What is the potential of teachers' use of action research methodologies in the classroom for the learning experiences of students who have learning differences (such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia)?
- What are the implications for policymaking in terms of improving educational equity through data-driven, teacher-led action research?

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RESEARCH TEAM

This project is led by researchers from [The School of Education at the University of São Paulo \(FEUSP\)](#) and five elementary schools¹. These organisations participate in the Schools2030 programme. Members of the university and schools will work together in research activities such as carrying out bibliographic studies, developing instruments for data collection, intermediating with members of central bodies of public school systems, collecting data and disseminating results.

The schools that will make up the Research Team are:

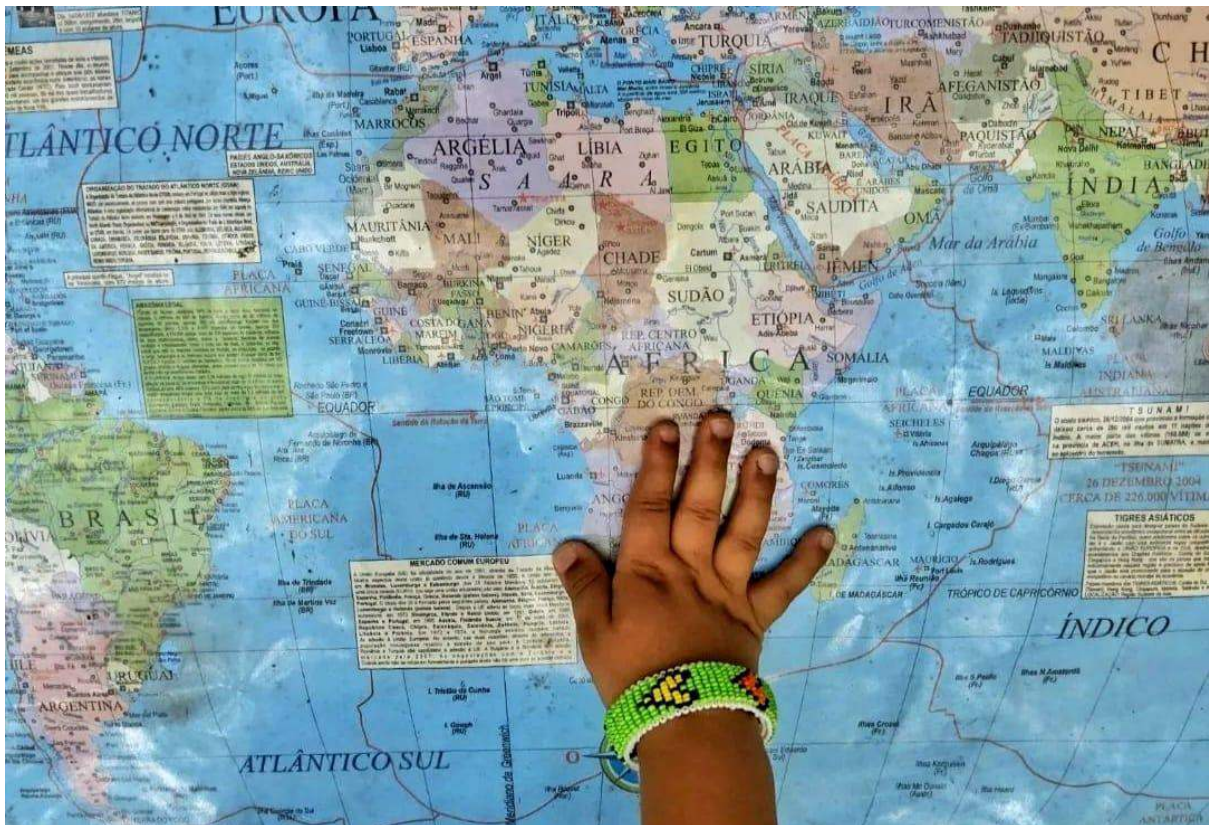
- **Antonio Coelho Ramalho School:** Located in the rural region of Ibiúna (São Paulo), it has been breaking with old paradigms towards building a democratic school and offering quality education for all. *Age group: 5 years.*
- **Baniwa Eeno Hiepole School:** Based in an Amazonian indigenous community, it has been building a new understanding of its role, assuming in its formative role the cultural needs of the ethnic group and its belonging to the territory as well as the recognition and strengthening of local knowledge. *Age group: 10 years.*
- **Dream School (“Escola dos Sonhos”):** Located in the rural region of Bananeiras (Paraíba), the school embraces popular and libertarian education principles, aiming to integrate its physical space with the rural environment. Since 2015, it has eliminated grade levels, traditional classes, and exams, opting for a curriculum centered on research projects and transdisciplinary learning approaches. *Age group: 10 years.*
- **São Paulo Federal Institute - São Roque campus:** Located in a small town in the interior of São Paulo, it promotes teaching, research, and extension activities in an integrated manner. Cooperative learning is the guiding principle of their work. *Age group: 15 years.*
- **CIEJA Campo Limpo:** It educates young people and adults from the periphery of São Paulo based on Paulo Freire's conceptions. *Age group: 15 years.*

The composition of the research team is diverse and interdisciplinary (sociology, anthropology, linguistics, geography, arts, pedagogy, and environmental sciences), including scholars from large urban centers, rural regions and indigenous Amazonian communities. There is gender balance and ethnic-racial diversity, with white, Afro-Brazilian and indigenous team members.

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Leila Rocha (Escola dos Sonhos), Anna Carolina Jardim (São Paulo Federal Institute), Juvencio Cardoso (Eeno Hiepole Baniwa Indigenous School), Mila Pedroso (Antonio Coelho Ramalho School), Lucas Delfino (Center for Youth and Adult Integration Campo Limpo)

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A young child points toward Africa on the map, embracing curiosity and connection to their roots

METHODS

Paulo Freire (1998) and Thiollent (1986) are great references in action research, an approach with an essential epistemological and methodological plurality (Rowell, Riel, and Polush 2017), supported by participatory processes of design, data collection, and interpretation of results, and oriented towards social change (Thiollent and Colette 2017). It provides a framework for those involved in problematic situations, in which professional researchers and participants learn together, subjecting the various points of view to triangulation of data and interpretations.

Schools2030 is carried out in Brazil as an action research effort, in which the university creates and strengthens opportunities for those involved to improve their knowledge, expanding their influence in the environments where they live. While requiring considerable improvisation (Beaulieu 2013), the proposal offers a way to strengthen the rigour and range of scientific activities.

In **Workstream 1**, the investigation will map the controversies (Venturini 2010) in the global literature on the relationship between action research and educational equity. This production will be analysed according to the

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types of evidence and its potential concerning this relationship in non-academic learning.

In **Workstream 2**, the production of primary data will be carried out by the research team. The investigation will include about 70 Brazilian schools that are part of Schools 2030, coming from all regions of the country and working in the three age groups (5, 10, and 15 years old). Contributions from the sociology of education (Dubet 1994), anthropology of education (Ingold 2020), social psychology (Pichon-Rivière 2005), and action research (Tripp 2005; Thiollent 2019) will guide the analysis. The activities include:

- A survey with teachers from schools participating in Schools2030 in Brazil on changes in perspectives regarding equity, and solutions to overcome inequalities;
- Selection of 30% of the teachers participating in Schools2030, for semi-structured interviews about changes in their know-how concerning educational equity;
- Mapping and analysis of policies developed to address educational inequalities by government agencies responsible for the five participating schools
- Participant observation in the five schools of the research team members;
- Collection and systematisation of opinions from teachers, administrators, students and family members on: learning expressed as equity in gender relations, inter-ethnic relations, and relations between students with and without disabilities; and occurrence of significant change in the development of these learnings during and after their participation in this action research process.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Within the context of the three social markers of diversity (gender, ethnicity, and disabilities) the issue of disability has gained prominence, particularly due to an increase in the number of pedagogical approaches associated with it. On the other hand, concerning the examination of racial dynamics, the research team is engaged in identifying indicators that have been previously documented in various research endeavours within the Brazilian context: racism often operates covertly, obscuring its manifestations. Instead of delineating strategies aimed at mitigating racial prejudices, our observations suggest a prevailing inclination among participants to assert the absence of racial discrimination within their immediate environment. Regarding gender and sexual orientation diversity, the preliminary findings suggest that the subject is treated as a taboo among teachers.

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A survey was conducted among 43 teachers from 14 educational organisations across eight municipalities in Brazil. The objective was to gauge teachers' perceptions regarding equitable interactions among students and the impact of action research on equitable relations, particularly concerning disabilities, race/ethnicity, and gender/sexual orientation. Findings reveal a nuanced perspective among teachers, indicating a discernible yet variable influence of action research on equitable relations across different social markers. Teachers emphasised the significance of school professionals' actions in fostering equitable relationships among students. Additionally, they highlighted the value of action research as a significant opportunity for teachers to reflect on and enhance their pedagogical practices. These insights underscore the intricate interplay between educational practices and societal dynamics in fostering equitable relationships within innovative educational environments.

Social Marker of Diversity	Research Findings
Disabilities	Higher incidence of disability-related pedagogical approaches.
Ethnicity	Identification of signs of racism, with an emphasis on its obscuration. Absence of explicit practices to combat racism; emphasis on the denial of the existence of racism.
Gender and Sexual Orientation	Theme identified as a taboo among teachers.

Table 1: Social Markers of Diversity and Research Findings

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Action Research Impact	Research Findings
Disabilities	Action research impact is detectable, although the actions carried out by school professionals are considered to be more significant.
Ethnicity	Action research impact seems constrained, with greater emphasis placed on the actions of school professionals.
Gender and Sexual Orientation	Action research has a discernible impact, although its effects are constrained. The actions of students and professionals are considered to be more significant.

Table 2: Teachers' Perceptions of Action Research Impact on Equity and Research Findings

NEXT STEPS

The team has concluded the initial phase, Workstream 1, which involved conducting a comprehensive literature review. The initial literature review report will serve as the cornerstone for the forthcoming publication of an article. As for Workstream 2, data collection has been completed and data analysis is underway. Evidence from both workstreams will inform subsequent reports and articles to be published.