Mapping the Field of Studies on Social Class and Educational Inequalities in Argentina[1]

Una Aproximación al Campo de Estudios sobre Clase Social y Desigualdades Educativas en Argentina

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Abstract: This paper maps the research on social class and educational inequalities at secondary level in Argentina. It offers a typology of studies according to their research problems, theoretical perspectives and methodology. It distinguishes four kinds of research traditions: the *socio-structural*, the *socio-historical*, the *socio-educational* and the *identity and subjectivity turn*. It is argued that, in the sub-field of Sociology of Education, there is coexistence of diverse and even antagonistic research traditions. Furthermore, this diversity could be understood both as a sign of the vitality of the field and of its low structuration and limitations. The vitality of the field is illustrated by the wide range of topics, questions, theories and methods used by researchers since the 1980s. Among the indicators of the low structuration of Sociology of Education, the author identifies the persistence of theoretical 'silences' and the marginality of reflexive accounts on how, who and what for knowledge is produced.

Key words: Argentina, educational research, educational inequalities, social class, social inequalities.

Resumen: Este artículo mapea la investigación desarrollada en Argentina sobre clase social y desigualdades educativas en el nivel secundario. Ofrece una tipología basada en los problemas de investigación, las perspectivas teóricas y las metodologías de los estudios realizados. Distingue cuatro tipos de tradiciones en investigación: la *socio-estructural*, la *socio-histórica*, la *socio-educativa* y la relativa a la *identidad y subjetividad*. En el artículo se argumenta que, en el sub-campo de la Sociología de la Educación, coexisten tradiciones investigativas muy diferentes, incluso antagónicas. Además, se plantea que esta diversidad podría ser interpretada tanto como signo de vitalidad así como de limitaciones y baja estructuración de este sub-campo de producción de conocimiento. En tanto que la diversidad de los temas, las teorías y los métodos en las investigaciones realizadas desde los años 80 ilustra la riqueza y el dinamismo del campo, la autora identifica la predominancia de 'silencios' teóricos

y la marginalidad de los análisis reflexivos sobre cómo, quién y para qué se produce el conocimiento, como indicadores de la baja estructuración de la Sociología de la Educación.

Palabras clave: Argentina, investigación educativa, desigualdades educativas, clase social, desigualdades sociales.

INTRODUCTION

In Western developed societies like the United Kingdom, the analysis of the dyad social class and educational inequalities has been central to the configuration of the sub-field of Sociology of Education (Lauder *et al.*, 2006). British sociologists of education, for instance, have examined the relationship between social stratification, social class and the educational system from a wide array of epistemological, theoretical and methodological perspectives (Ball, 2006; Bernstein, 1973; Bynner and Joshi, 2002). In the Argentinean multidisciplinary field of educational research[2], interest on social stratification based on material and/or symbolic differences has been paramount. However, we have not found previous systematic reviews of the ways in which the relationship between social class and education at secondary school level has been studied[3].

This article critically examines key Argentinean research traditions which have analysed the relationships between social class and educational inequalities at secondary education level from the 1980s onwards. Hence, this paper is an analytic exercise that proposes a preliminary typology. The focus on high school is justified by its relevance within the academic, educational policy arena, teachers' unions discourses, public concern and the media. The selection of this period was led by two main criteria. Firstly, since the 1980s onwards the field of educational research has grown in both quantitative and qualitative terms (see Suasnábar and Palamidessi, 2007). Secondly, the majority of the studies related to social class and education have been written in this period.

Like any review, this article is an exercise that demands selection of materials and perspectives according to its aims. In this sense, it is by definition focused and arbitrary. In the elaboration of this critical review, the term *social class* is used to identify Argentinean research that explores the interactions between social stratification and the educational system, independently of their theoretical assumptions and the concepts used to refer to the former. Research traditions are defined by the type of problems and objectives formulated,

their theoretical assumptions (when they are explicit) and the nature of methods employed[4]. The coexistence of diverse and even antagonistic research traditions around social class and educational inequalities could be interpreted as indicative of both the vitality and some weakness of the sub-field of Sociology of Education.

From the classification of the identified material, four research traditions are defined and will be analysed in turn in the following sections. Studies that reflect key features of each body of literature are summarised. The first tradition, which is labelled here as *socio-structural*, focuses on the relationship between the social structure and the differential educational opportunities and benefits of its social groups. The second tradition, the *socio-historical*, unpacks the role played by social groups in the emergence, development and diversification of the educational system at the secondary level. The third tradition, the *socio-educational*, describes and analyses the stratified nature of the secondary educational system. Finally, the most recent, the *identity/subjectivity turn* explores the connections between identity and subjectivity production of particular groups of students and their experiences within secondary schooling. Having described the four research traditions, an initial examination of the nature of the sub-field of Sociology of Education in Argentina and some of its strengths and weaknesses are presented. This article aims to contribute to the reflection on the nature of the field of 'educational knowledge' in Argentina (Suasnábar & Palamidessi, 2007; Tenti Fanfani, 1988, 2001).

THE SOCIO-STRUCTURAL TRADITION

Although this tradition has antecedents before the 1980s (see Wiñar (1974), Eichelbaum de Babini (1965, 1967, 1972)), the majority of research in this genre has been produced from 2000 onwards (see for instance Cerrutti and Binstock, 2004; Cervini, 2005; Feijoó, 2002; Herrán and Van Uythem, 2001; Judengloben *et al*, 2003; López, 2002; Riquelme and Herger, 2001). This perspective looks at the relationships between social groups' locations in the socio-economic structure and their differential access to education; performance/school failure[5] and/or permanence at the secondary level of education amongst social groups and types of schools. A collection of socio-economic factors strongly associated with them has been identified.[6]

The great majority of these studies do not make explicit their epistemological and theoretical assumptions[7]. In Argentina, this is also true of the wider field of sociology according to Sautu (2003). However, he argues, every research study has its assumptions and views about how society works and which aspects should be looked at and how particular types of phenomena could

be explained or interpreted. Here it is argued that studies in this tradition are mainly epistemologically grounded in positivism and/or post-positivism (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Sautu, 2003). Their general silence regarding theoretical perspectives could be associated with their institutional location in agencies (both governmental and non governmental) committed to the production of 'objective' and summary knowledge to inform policy making that seems to interpret theory as bias rather than as perspectives from which knowledge is produced. The majority of studies in the socio-structural tradition, although focused on social stratification and its interaction with the educational system, tend not to explicitly engage with wider theoretical debates about social class, social stratification, and its relations with education.

Within the socio-structural tradition, there are two main types of studies. The first, in line with the wider sociological field (Sautu, 2003), are descriptive and quantitative accounts that portray the extension of particular educational phenomena such as levels of access and school failure across social groups differentiated by diverse criteria such as poverty, levels of income and/or global volume of households' educational resources, or individual or households' educational vulnerability (see for instance Dabenigno and Tissera, 2002; Judengloben *et al.*, 2003; López, 2002; Vásquez *et al.*, 2004). These authors use data produced by various official organisations such as the *Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos-INDEC* (National Institute of Statistics and Census) These studies demonstrate a negative association between low levels of education of heads of household and/or income with educational access, permanence and performance at secondary level. In many instances, these relationships are mediated by other intervening variables such as socio-demographic composition of household. For example, López (2002) maps the volume and nature of the social, economic and educational resources of families and their participation in the labour market in order to see how these factors impact on young people's own participation in the labour market and education. He uses national individual and household data of the Permanent Household Survey (May, 998). López's study argues that young people from families with lower educational capital are more likely to participate in the labour market which, in many cases, strongly hampers their participation in the educational system. He shows that levels of education appear more important today than 25 years before in determining levels of household income.

Secondly, within the socio-structural tradition of research, only a minority of recent studies analyse the relationship between socio-economic and school factors to explain the differential educational achievement of diverse social groups (Cerrutti and Binstock, 2004; Cervini, 2003a, 2003b, 2005; Herrán and

Van Uythem, 2001). These studies analyse new data gathered by the Argentinean National Ministry of Education since 1997 about socio-economic variables, schools' organisational features and students' educational achievement in specific modules within representative samples of schools in primary and secondary education. Unlike the first type of research, some studies statistically test relations between different types of variables. Cervini (2003a) provides an example of this recent but still marginal trend examining the effects of attending public or private schools on cognitive attainment (in Language and Maths) and on non-cognitive results (attitudes toward Mathematics and the educational and achievement expectations) of students in the last school year of secondary education in Argentina. He engages with Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction (1996; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) and his insights about the institutional segmentation of the educational system to interpret the results of the multilevel analysis of quantitative data from the *Censo Nacional de Finalización del Nivel Secundario* 1998 (High School National Census of 1998). Cervini offers quantitative evidence of the social fragmentation of the Argentinean education system along a private/state school divide where private schools, when controlled by socio-economic status of its population, produce similar cognitive results to state schools and only score higher in non-cognitive aspects such as educational aspirations.

After mapping out the central findings of the first tradition, the socio-historical tradition that provides a fundamental historical analysis of the development of the state education system is presented.

THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL TRADITION

This tradition comprises a small number of relevant studies produced from the mid 1970s up to the 1990s (Filmus, 1999; Gallart, 1983; Puiggrós, 1996; Tedesco, 1983, 2003). These studies follow a historical narrative pattern (*esquema narrativo-histórico*) (Sautu, 2003). They aim to unpack the socio-economic and/or political rationale behind the configuration, development, and social differentiation of the secondary school system (whether as a main focus or as part of the wider development of the educational system). In order to do so, these researchers identify which social classes or socio-political groups that have been key players in the configuration of the system in terms of its objectives, structure, differentiation and curriculum content. This type of research uses a variety of sources such as statistics, documents (official and personal), and sociological, economical, political, and/or historical bibliography, as well as macro-sociological analyses that are close to historical research (Sautu, 2003).

The volume *Educación y Sociedad en la Argentina (1880-1945)* by Tedesco (2003) illustrates this tradition. It offers a collection of studies about the role that the oligarchy and the middle classes have played in the development of the national education system for the periods 1880-1900; 1900-1930 and 1930-1945. It is focused on the social aspects and bypasses issues related to pedagogical traditions. Tedesco uses both statistical data and documents such as testimonies of policy makers, head teachers, and parliamentary debates. He argues that, during the nineteenth century, the development of the educational system in Argentina was used by the oligarchy to construct its hegemony, and later, by the urban middle sectors to access the political system from which they had been excluded. In this view, the economic development of the country was only marginally related to the shape and nature of the educational system (in particular at secondary and tertiary level). According to him, the political and social aspirations of different groups (mainly the agricultural dominant classes and the urban middle sectors) are seen as the main engines for the development of the system as well as for the resistance to its transformation. For instance, Tedesco's analysis considers the period 1880-1900 as the foundational stage of the Argentinean educational system. During this time, the education system played the central political function of culturally assimilating and instilling respect for order in immigrants, and it was not specifically linked to the needs of the national economy. The education system grew considerably due to the political needs of the oligarchic regime whose political stability depended on the "education of the masses and the action of the local elites" (Tedesco, 2003: 155, my translation). This political rationale fostered the generalist nature of education and its emphasis on encyclopaedism. In this scenario, secondary education lacked its own legal framework and was the target of wider political and social conflicts. Despite some efforts to create vocational programmes during this period, the prevailing function of secondary education (with the exception of the *Normal* schools) was preparing students for university. Tedesco argues that the emergent and growing urban middle classes played a central role in the prevalence of this traditional preparatory function of secondary schools. These social groups perceived the traditional educational system as a legitimate channel for their social and political aspirations. Gaining access to secondary school and the university facilitated growing urban middle class groups' participation in administrative positions within the State bureaucracy; and configured a fertile ground for the production of the middle classes as a political class.

Now let's turn the attention to the more recent socio-educational tradition that describes and analyses different facets of the contemporary system of secondary education.

THE SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL TRADITION

The third research tradition describes and analyses recent processes of fragmentation and/or segmentation of the educational system. Research within this genre analyses the ways in which sets of schools configure educational circuits and how this segmentation affects and/or is affected by different social groups. The majority of literature explores how interests and rationales of schools and families feed into each other's definitions of their locations within a fragmented education system.

This tradition began during the 1980s with the works of Braslavksy (1985) and Braslavsky and Krawczyk (1988) in primary schools and Filmus (1985) and Krawczyk (1989) in secondary schools. During the 1990s, profound socio-economic transformations, together with the implementation of a national educational reform, fundamentally altered secondary schooling and its historical meaning within the structure of the education system and wider society. Some authors argue that, in this new scenario, the term *educational system* does not describe anymore what goes on in schools and it needs to be replaced by the notion of *educational fragmentation* (Tiramonti, 2004b, my translation). In the view of this author, schools and/or groups of schools constitute fragments defined as "self-referent space and the field is configured as a sum of these enclosed fragments with low or null articulation between them" (op. cit.: 14, my translation).

According to this wide body of research, the fragmented nature of the educational system referred to a material and symbolic differentiation among schools that contributes to unequal experiences of learning and schooling that tends to favour, although not necessarily, the reproduction of the social advantages or disadvantages of their intakes. These authors have identified a variety of features that are produced by the fragmentation of secondary education such as: i) the meanings teachers and parents attach to secondary education; ii) the availability of human and material resources; iii) students' educational achievements and their social and occupational aspirations; iv) family strategies towards schooling (including school choices); v) institutional strategies towards its intake (including views on the history of the school); vi) the role attributed to parents; vii) criteria for recruiting intake and teachers; viii) school actors' views about quality of education, teachers and authorities' roles and expectations; and, ix) students' social relations and styles of sociability (see for instance Filmus *et al.*, 2001; Kessler, 2002; Narodowski and Gómez Schettini, 2007; Poliak, 2004; Tiramonti, 2003, 2004a, 2004b; Veleda, 2007; CIPPEC-Centro de Implementación de Políticas Publicas para la Equidad y el Crecimiento, Buenos Aires, 2004).

The majority of the studies combine different qualitative (mainly interviews) and quantitative methods (CIPPEC, Poliak, Tiramonti, Veleda, referred to above). A number of them use only qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups (Kessler, 2002). Some of this research also analyses documents of different types provided by schools. Studies engage with a wide range of interpretative sociological perspectives[8] that contribute to the understanding of the profound social transformations of contemporary Argentinean society and how they have impacted on the configuration of the education system. However, they tend not to define their underpinning theoretical perspectives in relation to social stratification and the ways in which they interplay with schooling. The majority of the analyses avoid defining the concepts used to label social difference and inequality among groups. In other words, concepts such as *social class*, *middle class*, *low class*, *high class*, *sectores populares*, *social groups* and *socio-economic strata* are used but without being specified.

The volume *La trama de la desigualdad educativa* (Tiramonti, 2004a) illustrates this tradition. This is a collection of articles that explore different aspects and facets of the fragmentation of secondary education in the city and the province of Buenos Aires. In order to address the heterogeneity of the field of education, this study engages with diverse theoretical approaches and methods. Theoretically, the individualisation theories of Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992), together with the theory of desinstitutionalisation of Dubet and Martucelli (1998) and Bourdieu's theory (1996) of cultural reproduction, configure a fertile analytic framework for these studies. Some articles portray the nature of the fragmentation among schools while others analyse the strategies that particular social groups (such as the socio-economic elites) mobilize to reproduce their advantageous social positions through access to schools with high academic standards (see Tiramonti and Minteguiaga, 2004; Ziegler, 2004). Tiramonti and Minteguiaga analyse, in the context of the crisis of the historical functions of secondary schooling as means of social selection and of preparation for the labour market, how school actors interpret secondary education purposes and meanings. The authors argue that school actors produce a multiplicity of views about the secondary education role, and that the differences among these perspectives are not straightforwardly associated with social class differences. However, when used, the concept of social class is not defined. They state that school actors, particularly parents, see the school as a space of instruction and socialisation; and formation of individuals' autonomy. Despite this commonality, different schools offer diverse visions of what learning is and how it should be promoted. For instance, parents, teachers and head teachers of elite schools implicitly recognise schools as the means of social and moral reproduction of the social elite. Schooling, then, is linked to the production of social differentiation, "through the acquisition of

particular cultural and social capitals" (Tiramonti and Minteguiaga, 2004: 107, my translation), rather than with the production of a cultural homogeneity (whether encapsulated by the idea of nation or citizenship). Middle class (*sectores medios*) parents state that schools should *contener* (protect, support) their children through a pedagogy that engages students in the processes of learning. They stress the role that schools should play in the process of the autonomization of individuals through the acquisition of values and knowledge that promote students' ability to deal with a complex and changing reality. Finally, parents from low socio-economic sectors also highlight schools' role in *contención* (protection, support). However, they mainly interpret it as protection in terms of physical integrity from a hostile and dangerous outside world.

Having analysed the socio-educational tradition, the next section examines the central themes of the body of research which constitutes an identity/ subjectivity turn.

IDENTITY/SUBJECTIVITY TURN

In line with broader shifts and trends within the social sciences, the fourth tradition of the identity/subjectivity turn emerged during the late 1990s. It has encompassed a variety of qualitative studies on students' experiences of schooling. They have focused on the production of students' social, educational and/or individual identities within school social relations and available social and educational discourses (Duschatzky, 1998; Duschatzky and Corea, 2002; Feijoó and Corbetta, 2004; Kaplan and Fainsod, 2001; Maldonado, 2000). This research tradition has produced mainly qualitative accounts of the relationships between the identity/subjectivity of different groups of young people and secondary schooling.

Despite the centrality of the concepts of *identity* and *subjectivity*, the majority of studies are not explicit about how they conceptualise them (see Bravin, 2001; Duschatzky, 1998; Kaplan and Fainsod, 2001). Theoretically, they engage with a wide range of perspectives ranging from Bourdieu's theory of cultural production, post-structuralist psychoanalytic approaches, traditional and post-structuralist and post-modern approaches to identity, to the theory of recognition and distribution of Nancy Fraser (1995). The majority of them opts for an eclectic approach to theory and pull out theoretical tools of different kinds that help them to make sense of their data.

Within this tradition of research, one ethnographic case study (Maldonado, 2000) has been identified in the present investigative work. The rest of the

literature encompassed qualitative methods, including interviews and participant observations, within one or more schools[9]. Some studies also include applied surveys (Bravin, 2001; Kaplan and Fainsod, 2001). Maldonado, on the one hand, and Kaplan and Fainsod on the other illustrate important features of this tradition and are discussed in more detail.

The two latter authors analyse the school trajectories of a group of pregnant teenagers or teenage mothers from *sectores populares*. They explored how these girls interpreted their experiences of schooling and how they are intertwined with their views about the future (both at educational and occupational level) and themselves. Researchers applied surveys and carried out interviews with 22 teenagers between 16 and 23 years old who attended secondary schools in the south of the city of Buenos Aires. These young women lived in neighbourhoods with high degrees of social and educational vulnerability. These authors state that the condition of pregnancy and/or motherhood involves a certain degree of educational vulnerability which varies across institutions and families, however, being poor is the most persistent obstacle for continuing studies. They affirm that some pregnant teenagers and mothers interpreted school as a space of *contención* (protection) and solidarity where they could behave like young people again and they are invited to imagine new possibilities and horizons, adding that for many of these girls, the experience of schooling implied being recognised and named 'as individual singular subjects'. They also identified examples of the school operating as a symbolic arena where alternative horizons were actively closed (promoting dropping out) for some girls due to the discriminatory discourse of some teachers. It could be argued that for Kaplan and Fainsod, implicitly and without any direct reference to theoretical perspectives about identity/subjectivity, experiences of school are seen as intimately linked to processes of identity making of these groups of teenage women.

On the other hand, Maldonado (2000) offers an ethnographic account of one state secondary school with a socially mixed population in the commercial and administrative area of the city of Córdoba. She focuses her attention on two form classes in the last school year of secondary schooling. This author's research explores the ways in which teenagers "select and classify each other, want and reject others, integrate or exclude themselves" (op. cit.: 13) in order to see what kind of practices and representations they have about themselves and 'the other' (in this case, their peers). Unlike the majority of the studies, the author explicitly demarcates her theoretical underpinnings and links processes of identity making and social stratification. She uses Bourdieu's key concepts of *habitus* and *capitals*. She is particularly interested in unveiling how differential habitus (with its own ways of classifying and experiencing

the social world) transforms social and cultural diversity into inequalities due to its tendency to inscribe it within the order of 'nature' and not within the structuring and structured processes of social construction. She describes how, within each school form class, students make and re-make social groups and how these processes are enmeshed within wider dynamics of social class differentiation between the impoverished middle classes and the poor. With differential symbolic and material resources, these groups deploy everyday strategies to distinguish themselves from the 'others'. These strategies of distinction encompass a wide array of behaviours, views and even gestures and glances. Following Bourdieu, Maldonado considers that this search for equals tends to reproduce social groups and operates as social protectionism, arguing that students are interested in making social distances visible and to do so they mobilize their social and cultural capitals in matters not related to schooling.

PLURALITY AND LOW STRUCTURATION OF THE SUB-FIELD OF SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION: A WORKING HYPOTHESIS

Up to the present, only few studies have looked at the development of the field of educational knowledge in Argentina (Suasnábar and Palamidessi, 2007; Tenti Fanfani, 1988) and none at the emergence and nature of the sub-field of Sociology of Education. This preliminary typology offers some evidence of the plural and low structured nature of this sub-field of knowledge production.

As seen in the previous section, research on social inequalities and education has engaged with a variety of epistemological, theoretical and methodological perspectives. This heterogeneity is similar to that of Sociology and Social Sciences both in Argentina and in western post-industrial societies (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1995; Sautu, 2003). This diversity reflects, on the one hand, wider developments within disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, history and education, and, on the other, the attempts in the field of the sub-discipline to grasp the complex and dynamic nature of social differentiation and inequalities within national educational systems. In this sense, the coexistence of a variety of questions, theories and methods signals the richness of the Argentinean sub-field of Sociology of Education in terms of its contributions to understanding different facets of the role that the education system plays in the production, reproduction or challenge of social inequalities.

However, from this analysis of the research traditions, it is possible to pin down some weaknesses or difficulties within this sub-field. In line with Tranfani's (1988) analysis, research about social class and education indicates that Sociology of Education has not yet configured a structured and autonomous

academic field. One illustration is the fact that although there are several academic journals about education[10], the majority publishes results of sociological research alongside productions within other disciplines such as pedagogy and didactics, history, political science and anthropology. In other words, the lack of specialized journals in Sociology of Education could be interpreted as a sign of the low structuration of this sub-field of knowledge production. Specialized journals contribute to systematically and regularly disseminate research findings, discuss the boundaries of their sub-fields, research questions, theoretical perspectives and methodological strategies. That is to say, like other academic arenas (such as Faculties, Research Institutes, conferences, scientific seminars, academies, professional associations, etc.), specialized journals contribute to the dialogue and confrontation amongst academics about legitimate ways of doing research (Bourdieu, 1997). The inexistence of a specialized journal seems to reflect both the nature of the field of Educational Sciences (Suasnábar and Palamidessi, 2007; Tenti Fanfani, 1988) and the marginality of Sociology of Education within Sociology.

Another sign of the low structuration of the sub-field of Sociology of Education is the lack of means to evaluate the methodological strategy of the majority of research. Many studies (in particular in the last two traditions) omit the presentation of their methodological choices and the ways in which they relate to their research problems and theoretical underpinnings. A further indicator of the low structure of this sub-field is the existence of theoretical *silences* or lacunas in a variety of studies. As seen above, certain concepts, relationships and assumptions are not made explicit, which hamper the understanding of the nature of the research process, its epistemological assumptions and its claims in terms of legitimacy and representation.

These absences in the published material do not imply that researchers have not made their theoretical and methodological choices. As Sautu (2003) argues, these decisions are always made. On the contrary, this common omission suggests that there is not yet a common sense within the sub-field that demands its participants to make more accountable their research at theoretical and methodological levels and, in this way, to confront their views and criteria with others in their common efforts to configure a more autonomous scientific academic field as Bourdieu and Tenti Fanfani state.[11]

This article has summarised key areas of sociological research in education, its varied and relevant contributions and some of its weaknesses. In this sense, this paper hopes to contribute to the strengthening of the sub-field of Sociology of Education as a more autonomous, reflexive and structured field.

NOTES

1   The author specially thanks Alejandra Cardini, Cecilia Veleda, Patricia Salti and Valeria Dabenigno for their comments and suggestions of different diversions of this paper.

2   It encompasses a variety of disciplines such as history, pedagogy, sociology and psychology.

3   The only identified partial and indirect accounts can be found in the works of López (2002); Tedesco (1983); Feijoó (2002); and Narodowski (1999). The first two authors describe different kinds of educational research that looks at school failure and its associated factors both at primary and secondary education level. Feijoó offers a more systematic review of the Argentinean socio-educational research about the social demand of education; the main features of schools and the system and how they receive students; and, finally, students' performance. The author looks at initial, elementary and secondary education. Finally Narodowski (1999) critically examines the Latin American educational research field (with specific references to the Argentinean case) and identifies key theoretical and methodological tendencies.

4   In the Argentinean context, the lack of journals specialized in Sociology of Education and of virtual databases or catalogues has demanded a wide strategy for identifying studies and analyses of the relationship between social and educational inequalities. For instance, visits to the most important bibliographic archives within the City of Buenos Aires and search of the official websites of a collection of governmental and non governmental international and national organisations (such as *Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales*, and *Instituto Internacional de Planeamiento Educativo* (an organisation that belongs to the United Nations). Moreover, articles were also searched in digital peer reviewed journals (such as *Education Policy Analysis Archives* (EPAA), *Revista Electrónica de Investigación Educativa*, and *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación*).

5   Studies in Argentina tend to focus on school failure (repetition and drop out) rather than on academic achievement in relation to national standards. The period 1997-2000, following broader international trends, was the first time that information on academic achievement was gathered by a national survey.

6   There are several analyses that examine the relationship between education and the labour market (see for instance Gallart 2001, 2002). However they have not been included in this tradition because their main focus of interest is "*programas de capacitación*" (labour training programmes) that mainly take place outside the educational system.

7   As exceptions see López (2002), Cervini (2003a, 2003b) and Dabenigno and Tissera (2000).

8   Among the perspectives applied are Dubet and Martucelli's (1998) theory of desinstitutionalisation of contemporary French society; Giddens and Beck's theory of individualisation and risk society; Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproductions; theories on the configuration of social and political elites; and policy sociology.

9   Several studies do not specify their methodological design (see for instance, Gluz (2005)).

10 For instance, see the Argentinean journals *Revista del Instituto de Investigaciones en Ciencias de la Educación*; *Propuesta Educativa. Revista de Educación de FLACSO*; *Revista Argentina de Educación*, and *Historia de la Educación. Anuario.*

11 This "common sense" is defined by the objective social and institutional conditions of production of the field and not by its individual participants (see Bourdieu, 1997).

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