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**“El trabajo de enseñar en el *Ciclo Básico* en una Escuela Secundaria Estatal: construcciones metodológicas, dispositivos didácticos y singularidad de alumnos/as”.**

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This paper examines how some teachers, men and women, face the difficulties and dilemmas of the job of teaching the new cohorts of young students that have recently entered the state secondary schools, coming from the majority “popular” classes and from homes with a low profile of previous schooling. This process followed the growing extension of secondary schooling, in the wake of legislation in the nineties that established compulsory schooling through grade 12, and the successive educational reforms that put forth a set of plans and programs marked by the discourse of “inclusion” and “attention to diversity”.

In this paper I present the case of Natalia, who teaches “Citizenship and participation” courses, in the 2nd year of the Basic Cycle (7-9) of a State Secondary School on the outskirts of the city of Córdoba, Argentina, as an example of how teachers design their “didactic constructions” (or lesson plans) resorting to a series “school devices or mechanisms” (*dispositifs*) that are readily available resources for the classroom format (ways of representing contents and of grouping students, learning activities, images, notebook formats, patterns of interaction, modes of evaluation and grading, among others), together with novel resources, and make innovative use of them in their work with the students. Their particular choices aim first to get students to actually “do” (carry through) the learning activities, and secondly to attend to the singularity of the individual students in their class by connecting with their cultural repertories and social history.

The notion of *dispositif* (translated as devise, mechanism, also disposition in an Old Eng. sense), following the concept proposed by Foucault (1991), has a dominant strategic function that aims to achieve certain effects in subjects and has been associated with the school as an institution (Dusssel) and with its constitutive parts. It is important to note the historicity of the disposition of the school form, analyzed by Vincent, Lahire and Thin (2001), with both its durability in time and the resistances it provokes. We can also link the school form to the category of “school culture”, proposed by Julia (2001, p. 10), as a complex interlinking of norms and practices. Rockwell (2013) notes that “school cultures… the practices and knowledges reproduced and legitimated… can be quite different among levels, modalities, disciplines and regions, and even between individual schools”.

In Natalia’s narrative, as in those of other teachers in her school, there are recurrent references to the effort and the high expenditure of energy required in the work of teaching due to the students’ behavior. The size of the groups makes it difficult to regulate student behavior and to accompany each of them pedagogically, as students constantly engage in actions related to their own social life which decenter them from learning tasks, generating rather noisy classroom environments.

In analyzing Natalia’s didactic plan for teaching the curricular content on “Identity” in two lessons, I reconstruct the use of a “*dispositif*”, or devise, that gave priority to learning activities designed to have students engage in a “practical activity”, while also adjusting and attending to their singularity as persons. She developed tasks and used resources such as writing a definition for “Identity”, after a discussion on the topic, which combined her ideas with the students previous knowledge. She then asked students to fill in a “Personal Identity sheet”, as a way of working towards self-knowledge, and finally to “draw and color a mandala”, in which the forms and colors were to express their own personality, and to describe the meaning of their choices.

According to Natalia, these school activities and resources had the purpose of facilitating what she considered as “concrete thinking”. According to her interpretation, this was a characteristic of the cultural repertoires that students brought to school. She, as well as other teachers, designed school activities in order to link the abstract school contents with everyday experience, and with the students’ own histories and personalities.

The “practical” tasks required written production together with designs and schemes that the students were then supposed to save in their loose-ring notebooks. The notebooks themselves are a typical “device” within the “*dispositif*” of the school form. In Natalia’s didactic plan, we can identify another “device” in her way of evaluating. She based her evaluation and grading on the products of the class work, and thus was able to avoid learning schemes based solely on “studying” for an exam. The tasks of teaching, learning and evaluation were integrated in the same lesson and activity (as contrasted, for example, with “studying for an exam”).

Natalia’s didactic armature also sought to attend to the students’ different and unequal dispositions, times, rhythms and interests in relation to the subject matter. In the case of different student ability in producing a written text, for example, she would ask students to express their ideas orally, and would interpret their learning and assign the final grade based on their oral answers. I detect another didactic scheme in her particular way of “being careful of” the students’ emotions and sensibilities, particularly as the activities she proposed for the lessons on *Identity* asked students to express their personal sentiments and characteristics drawing on their own experiences and life histories. In this case, the teacher constructs practices that singularize and differentiate students according to their various dispositions during the proposed discussions and activities. Based on these distinctions, Natalia intervened helping particular students do the activities or reprimanding their behavior. Nevertheless, she would also become disconcerted and dubious regarding how to act, didactically, with some particular students.

Beyond the articulation of the methodological construction and the didactic *dispositifs* designed with an eye to the singularities of the students, Natalia faced obstacles, difficulties and issues concerning the way to work with some individual students. Many of the singular personalities in this numerous class-group expressed strong resistance to regularly “entering into” academic class work. This phenomenon might account for the processes of negotiation, participation and reshaping of class activity that the students continually proposed or imposed through their own practices, as they face the practices and resources that the teacher used in her didactic construction. Students also challenged the more general schools *dispositif,* which framed and defined the work of teaching and learning. This dynamic translated into students’ attempts to modify the tasks the teacher asked of them and often defied the basic tenets of the “school form”.

In the opportunities and tensions found in the articulation between a didactic option and the available school *dispositifs*, Natalia sought to solve the “distance” (Perrenoud, 2007). between what the curricular design proposed, what she herself considered indispensable to teach (the particular *reduction* of contents), and what she considered possible to achieve with these students. She attempted to adjust the process of teaching to their modes of learning, according to her interpretations (based on her teaching experience) of the cultural repertoires that they brought with them following particular trajectories and social experiences That is, she constructed that part of teaching and learning that is “necessary, possible and real” (Lerner 2003), given the students dispositions when faced with classroom tasks and meanings and school regulations.