Let's Talk About Poverty — Collective and Significant Elaboration of Concepts: A Learning Experience That Links the Tertiary and Secondary Levels

Lorena Alejandra Gorlero[1,2], Rocío Imaz[3]

(1. Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, Buenos Aires' University; Argentina;

2. Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, Autonomous University of Entre Ríos, Argentina;

3. Instituto Superior del Profesorado Esteban Adrogué)

Abstract: It is not usual to be direct and immediate witnesses of how conceptual and procedural contents seen and analyzed for the tertiary level materialize in classroom work in secondary school. Neither its applicability in different disciplines that integrate the Social Sciences, despite the insistence on understanding the social complexity from all possible perspectives.

Nevertheless, there is full agreement on the importance of strengthening the link between teachers and schools; in achieving the significance of knowledge for students and in recognizing the difficulties that teachers face when proposing these practices within our curricular plans.

In this work we want to present the experience we have as a teacher and student-teacher in a Teacher Training Institute and a secondary school in the Province of Buenos Aires. The multidimensional treatment of the concept of Poverty made possible a didactic transposition that went through educational levels and that had as a nexus the methodological resignification in different curricular spaces — Geography in the tertiary and Citizen Education for the middle level. This was evidenced both in the group and collaborative work proposals and in the flexibility of the didactic resources implemented at both levels.

The formulation of autonomous ideas, the accompaniment and motivation to research a complex social problem, creativity and the possibility of immersing oneself with their own personal experiences in an empathic way, resulted in meaningful and valuable learning for our young people in the secondary for teachers in training.

"I would say that the Social Sciences are a necessary knowledge; Necessary for what? good necessary, fundamentally, to exercise citizenship in an active and responsible way" (Mario Carretero: The meaning of teaching Social Sciences).

Key words: collective construction of concepts, significant learning, methodological transfers between levels, flexibility of teaching resources

---

Lorena Alejandra Gorlero, Education Specialist, Collage Professor of History; History Teacher, Teaching Social Sciences, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires; Facultad de Humanidades, Artes y Ciencias Sociales, Universidad Autónoma de Entre Ríos. E-mail: alegorlero21071970@gmail.com.

Rocío Imaz, History Teacher, Instituto del Salvador, Instituto Superior del Profesorado Esteban Adrogué; research areas: social sciences. E-mail: Roci.imaz@live.com.ar.

1. Introduction

It is not usual to be direct and immediate witnesses of how conceptual and procedural contents seen and analyzed for the tertiary level materialize in classroom work in secondary school. Neither its applicability in different disciplines that integrate the Social Sciences, despite the insistence on understanding the social complexity from all possible perspectives.

However, there is full agreement in both academic and school areas on the importance of strengthening the link between teachers and schools, structuring classes with multi and interdisciplinary perspectives, achieving the meaning of knowledge for students and recognizing the difficulties that teachers go through when proposing these practices within our curricular plans.

The teaching work is complex and overwhelming, it undergoes social criticisms amplified by the media and many times it is carried out alone generating oppression, fatigue and fatigue. But at the same time it is one of the few professions that are chosen by vocation, resulting in tasks that far exceed schedules and transcend school walls. And this is because the daily task is wrapped in values, feelings and humanistic ethics. The search for teaching processes that are targeted in powerful learning necessarily goes to our road maps and planning.

In this work we want to present the experience we have as a teacher and student-teacher both in a Teacher Training Institute and in a secondary school, both of Buenos Aires Province.

From the idea of collectively constructing the concept of Poverty from the richness of multidimensionality in a subject of Geography Teaching, a didactic transposition was generated that went through levels of education and had as a nexus the methodological resignification in different curricular spaces — Geography in the tertiary and Citizen Education for the middle level. This was evidenced both in the group and collaborative work proposals and in the flexibility of the didactic resources implemented at both levels. The formulation of autonomous ideas, the accompaniment and motivation to research a complex social problem, creativity and the possibility of immersing oneself with their own personal experiences in an empathic way, resulted in meaningful and valuable learning for our young people in the secondary for teachers in training.

We will begin the journey as the processes arose chronologically; In each instance, corresponding to each level, we will briefly characterize the educational institutions and the curricular spaces that generated the proposals, and then describe the experiences separately. In them you can visualize some categories derived from the constructivist approach applied to the real and concrete dimension of the classroom.

2. The Beginning of the Experience: Building Concepts in Teachers

"What we have to learn we learn by doing" (Aristotle).

"With my teachers I have learned a lot; with my colleagues, more; with my students even more" (Hindu proverb).

2.1 The Institution

The Esteban Adrogué Higher Institute began its operation in 1993 with three technical careers. When the Federal Continuing Teacher Training Network was created, training and post-degree courses began to be offered for the Province of Buenos Aires, including those for the Maternal Garden and Adult Education. Since 1998 the Teaching Certification for Professionals and Technicians was issued, having achieved full recognition of the Ministry of Education of the Nation as a semi-face-to-face career. In 2004, the institute's commitment to the local

community was extended in response to the need for new teachers in the area; Thus, under Resolutions 25/03 and 26/03 respectively, and following the curricular designs of the Province, those of History and Geography were opened.

2.2 The Curricular Space: Social Perspective

The proposal made for the subject Social Perspective I tries to contribute to the future teachers of Geography the specificities of demographic problems and their close link with economic and territorial dynamics. Social complexity requires problematizing each of the elements that give meaning to the resulting structure in a given time and space, especially if it is understood that in the post-Fordist and globalized capitalist system, social conflict extends to population logic. That is why the study of the population is considered before a mere statistic, a vital part of social analysis.

In line with the theoretical approach used in curricular designs for Geography in high school, the topics developed in the second year subject are treated in a way that allows teachers to study demographic phenomena in a comprehensive manner. Thus, it is intended that the future teacher in Geography knows both the main demographic problems, as well as the theoretical interpretations that are made in their turn. To achieve this objective, work is being done to develop conceptual, analytical and practical tools that reach a both synchronous and diachronic approach, considering different spaces and temporalities, looking at multi-causality, identifying and contrasting the relationships that occur within the societies and contributing to the analysis and critical reflection, and then be turned over in the work in front of the classroom about concrete and real problems.

During the course, particular emphasis is placed on the link between theory and teaching practice, creating spaces for our students to become teachers. Although Social Perspective is a matter of the trunk of the curricula, we are in favor of generating moments in which young people appropriate both knowledge, conceptual and methodological tools, as well as different places in the classroom. Thus, we encourage thinking about the topics that are developed in class based on their professional future, developing various teaching-pedagogical strategies. Our perspective on this is the constructivist, for which you learn by doing.

For several years, Social Perspective became a four-monthly subject with a regime that supports the workshop modality and that contemplates working with ICT. This arises from the realities that were observed in those who attend a teaching staff: young people who have just left secondary school with a lack of procedural tools and who begin to abandon their courses quickly either because they cannot support the academic requirement or because daily attendance is incompatible with its extended working hours. To this we must add no less data considering the location of the Teaching Staff and it is the dependence on the normal operation of the Roca railway.

3. Analysis of the Experience under the Constructivist Perspective

The course that summons us was composed of five students with ages, profiles and heterogeneous socio-economic situations. From the diagnosis it emerged that we were facing a group with life experiences that strongly marked their positions on the subjects of the subject. This determined our work methodology and the axes in which we would particularly anchor. Thus, we decided to point out in the Population, Quality of Life and Welfare axis, where we analyzed problems such as living conditions, employment and poverty.

Finding ourselves in the middle of the course, and having previously dealt with issues related to the distribution and composition of the population, made and analyzed pyramids and graphs and analyzed the

Demographic Transition model for different regions of the country and the world, we started talking about poverty. In the last part of a class and following the "brainstorming" technique, it was proposed to listen to the voices of the group regarding what poverty was for them. Initiall the alumnxs conformed to more classical definitions and we would say politically correct; but shortly after walking, preconceptions, prejudices and opinions spread widely spread socially and associated the condition of poverty with laziness and "(des)merit" itself.

Once all these ideas were exposed, the Encrucijada magazine n°51 (2011) was presented exclusively dedicated to the treatment of Poverty from the perspectives provided by the different academic units that make up the University of Buenos Aires. The first two articles, that of Hallú (2011) on education as a means to eradicate poverty, and that of Kliksberg (2011) on the myths that are generated about poverty would be mandatory reading for the entire course, while the rest of the publications each student would choose one to present soon. Thus, based on their interests, life experiences or curiosity, the students chose such varied approaches as the social marginalization caused by the lack of access to drinking water (Vázquez y Palacios, Faculty of Engineering), the perennial of Chagas disease (Gurtler, Exact and Natural Sciences), the unequal accessibility to medicines (Lagomarsino, Pharmacy and Biochemistry), the territory as a means for social construction and the defense of rights (Rodríguez, Social Sciences) and the gap between poor and rich people who present individual freedoms still in full democracy (Vidiella, Philosophy and Letters).

Several and related were the purposes we pursued with this activity: on the one hand, that our students could face the preparation of a subject as if it were in front of a class; that appropriate methodological tools for learning (ICT, graphics, cartography among others); continue developing skills and procedures; add vocabulary of the Social Sciences; all this, sustaining and sustained by the need to talk about poverty from a perspective that allows the incorporation of multi-dimensionality, that is, to start thinking of Poverty not as a pre-established problem or as a single condition, but as a set of situations. Once exposed each article we would elaborate in class some possible definition of Poverty and we would see how much it seemed to which we had verbalized classes back.

Meanwhile, we continue to work with forms of mediation of poverty, the concepts of structural poverty and new poor; We analyzed the Population Census questionnaires that interrogate the NBI and saw models of the Permanent Household Surveys.

What began to happen in the course was truly moving and — I must say — gratifying. Through the WhatsApp group they began to share articles they found on the Internet, they took photos of their places of residence to show the conditions of material life and the shared public spaces, they maintained the discussions beyond the course and they exchanged opinions on what they watched in their jobs or in their daily lives.

When the day arrived, the Social Perspective students presented their articles with different formats (posters, ICT) before the course. But they took an autonomous step, and without it being contemplated in the slogans, they decided the order of the exhibitions based on a coherence and logic of the story held by everyone.

Finally, and after all that journey, the group began to collectively and collaboratively build a concept of Poverty that surpassed the one they initially held. In it, they managed to incorporate different aspects to analyze such a complex problem: population residing in marginalized areas with lack of basic services and lack of security; unequal power relations that translates into institutions with impoverished territorial anchorage and weak community organizations; irregular presence of the state and its consequence on the wide violation of rights (education, health, accessibility, transportation); myths reproduced by the media that build common senses and distorting realities. Understand poverty as a multidimensional issue, analyze it critically, look at it empathically, think of it as content to be taught in high school.

Why do we recognize a constructivist program in the experience reported? For this perspective, learning consists not only in the acquisition of knowledge, but also in the modification of the same through the changes that occur in the subjects involved in the process. Among its many edges, constructivism is interested in studying and analyzing the interactions between previous knowledge, new ones that are incorporated and those resulting from learning as a whole. It is questioned about the mechanisms that allow a restructuring of knowledge in students and how it influences the practices that we carry out teachers in the daily life of our classrooms (Fairstein: 2015). Cognitive research proved that in order to solve a problem specific to a specific discipline, it is important to manage the specific conceptual networks that the learning subject has. A large semantic network that adds elements and links and activates them through experience, will result in a rich, nurtured and powerful learning. An apprenticeship that will allow the student to infer, link, deduce, produce and reproduce differently notions in a meaningful and contextualized way (Carretero, 2014).

On the other hand, from the beginning we set out to genuinely and genuinely retake the previous knowledge of our students and based on the diagnostic evaluation of the group and taking into account its characteristics, work with the theme Poverty both in individual activities and especially those developed in group. Studies and research in constructivism argue that the mind does not operate alone or that knowledge or learning is constructed in isolation. There is a social, physical and artificial context that influences and acts in the learning of people, that is to say that distributed cognitions work as a system that encompasses the individual and their cultural environment (Solomon, 2001). There is a distribution of cognitions in a kind of web or web pattern that involves the participation of students and teachers, each with its history, training, strengths and weaknesses; but also that it necessarily includes diverse objects and previously consolidated knowledge.

In our case, in the interaction, with a calling theme and analyzed from multi-dimensionality, using different supports, and having the teacher as a guide, an enriched product was developed collaboratively that enabled the restructuring of individual knowledge and self-assessment. Motivation played a key role and Social Perspective students became researchers as well as teachers. Undoubtedly that was masterfully demonstrated in the experience that my partner will tell next.

Spilling Myths: Discussing Poverty As A Social Problem in A Classroom of the Secondary School

"I don't teach my students, I just provide them with the conditions in which they can learn" (Einstein).

a) The institution and the curricular space: Construction of Citizenship

For a year I have been a professor of the subject Construction of Citizenship at the Instituto del Salvador, located in the town of Burzaco, Party of Admiral Brown, in the southern area of Buenos Aires. Taking advantage of the institutional style of supporting and accompanying teachers in the generation of autonomous work proposals, I set out to carry out a quarterly project with my students in the third year of high school of this subject that is part of the Social Sciences area. To begin with, I chose to consider the curricular design as a base document, and then add the proposed readings in the Social Perspective curriculum of the Geography Faculty who was currently studying.

Regarding the subject Citizen Construction, the curricular design proposes that: "citizenship is situated as a key concept in this political-educational proposal and is understood as the product of the links between people, and therefore conflictive, since relations Social in community they are. In this way, daily practices such as youth practices, pedagogical, school and/or institutional practices that can be challenged from other social places are recognized by recognizing the tensions that they imply. A citizenship that is built, developed and exercised both inside and outside the school: by learning, by expressing oneself, by educating, by organizing, by linking with

other young people and with other generations" (DGCE Buenos Aires, 2007, p. 13).

In the foundation of the subject I state that in its dictation it is important that students acquire socially productive knowledge for their role as citizens with full rights, promoting the construction of an active citizenship and generating understanding and reflection about the importance of getting involved in reality that crosses them. We consider citizens and the problems related to them, as a socio-historical construction that needs to be analyzed and studied in each case and circumstance.

b) The story of the experience lived and worked

To these usual patterns present in the planning of my classes, last year was added the inspiration that came from the course of Social Perspective in the Geography Faculty of the Esteban Adrogué Higher Institute, by the hand of Professor Alejandra Gorlero in charge of Said curriculum space. Within the various units that make up your program, we begin to analyze the one that contained poverty as a central concept.

Thus, both the collective and multifocal construction of the concept of Poverty, the methodology of work carried out with my colleagues (inside and outside the walls of the training institute) and the bibliography used, became triggers to translate the concept of "poverty" of a Teacher's classroom to my high school classroom. Specifically, and given the characteristics of the group and the possible topics to discuss, the choice fell on my 3rd year students of Citizenship Construction.

Being the subject "Construction of Citizenship" a space in which children can choose and discuss the contents, a subject where the contents represent current problems and that are experienced day by day, I decided to take poverty as a social problem to the secondary school classroom. As expressed above, the curriculum design promotes "[…] pedagogical practices that focus on the potential of joint work, respect for the knowledge of the communities, that adolescents and young people can do and want to learn, and that teachers can and they want to teach " (DGCE Buenos Aires, 2007, p. 21).

At the exact moment I read the articles of the magazine Encrucijada (2011) I began to think how to adapt that to my students. Although it was perhaps a geography content, I felt that I could not overlook that they could also build — among all and with other possible looks — the concept of poverty. I considered that the most appropriate thing was to bring the authentic material that I had worked in the Teaching Staff. In particular, I think that the most remarkable aspect of this edition is the article dedicated to the myths of poverty (Kliksberg, 2011) and it was the one I specifically chose to work in class.

The article starts from the premise that the poor are not poor because they want and that getting out of that condition is harder than it is held or wants to believe. The myths that society builds on them are fed back and sustained over time and fall into the "common sense" of people. Having chosen the what, the difficult part was the how, that is, to select the method with which the students would approach the text. Being an article so rich in concepts and at the same time full of realities that cross us all (teenagers 14/15 years also), we should start from the assessment of the ideas and preconceptions with which the children came to classes regarding to poverty.

The main objective of the project was that children could analyze poverty as a social problem and a multicual phenomenon, observe it critically and with elements that surround students in their family and/or neighborhood environment and contribute to the demystification of how poor it is because he wants to be. The latter was one of the most sustained and repeated ideas by the group.

From the theoretical perspective I enlisted in that of meaningful learning. This theory allowed me to work in a more enriching way with my students and my role as a teacher was first and foremost as a guide and counselor (Carretero, 2009). I started from previous knowledge and there we could see what they thought of poverty, who

the poor are, how they are seen in society. Being such a broad and comprehensive topic, each boy could select a certain area to work in depth according to their own interests and according to what they find most attractive, and therefore, significant. The socio-economic-cultural context in which young people are involved and that conditions them began to be decisive in class discussions.

The maximum justification for why this content work is that I believe that students — through their passage through high school — must form their identity, position themselves in society and develop their own arguments for the construction of a responsible Citizenship and engaged. And what better way to carry out this work than through the analysis of the society that surrounds them, particularly with an issue that is considered a permanent and inescapable part of the national government's agenda. Again I rely on the curriculum design to support my justification against the proposal: "[...] in adolescence and youth there is a restructuring of identifications, you gain autonomy, you need a new place in the world, a location that will be built around parental membership groups, social class, ethnicities, gender, religions or aesthetic preferences among other distinctions, but also with the type of relationship that the person builds around rights and the responsibilities in society" (DGCE Buenos Aires, 2007, p. 15).

The first step I took was to present the concept of "poverty" in the classroom and see what it generated in my students. In response to this I received several ideas about why people "fall" into poverty and why they cannot or want to get out of there. There were a variety of definitions and ideas about what it means to be poor, from not being able to have a last model cell phone until being able to have a plate of food. From this, we begin to work on a possible definition of poverty. And I advanced to the course that poverty was more than the mere definition that says that a poor person is one who does not see the basic needs such as food, health, shelter, work resolved or met. Previously we had analyzed the classification of human rights, their importance, their (in) compliance and the role of the State as a guarantee of them.

Present the text of Bernardo Kliksberg mentioned above and we dedicate an entire class for collective reading, making the necessary explanations to any doubt about vocabulary, concepts, historical context or the semantics of it. The following week we recovered the key concepts of reading and presented the activity, which consisted of forming groups of no more than four people, selecting a myth from those previously read and starting a process to bring them down argumentatively. To achieve this, they had to look for information in newspapers, magazines, news, interviews that would justify why the sentences were myth and not reality. At the end of this stage, they made a film exposing everything worked. To complete the project, students had to look for situations typical of the reality of our country — mainly those provided by the media - that contributed to breaking down the myths of poverty. There was a kind of plenary with the realities found.

All the trajectory worked involved collaborative and group learning by carrying out scaffolding among the members of the group; research work on different sources, including the mass media; link with the surrounding environment, observing the realities that many Argentines suffer; problematize and look for possible solutions; work with comprehensive reading skills, individual and group writing, communication and argumentation strategies.

Undoubtedly, the most interesting thing was that the students were able to resolve a conflict by taking elements of both reading specialized literature, and with the reality that crosses and surrounds them. They were able to link with him through a critical and autonomous look, and from there reformulate and rework their previous ideas to contemplate poverty as a complex social problem that undoubtedly involves them as future citizens.

4. Conclusions

We believe it is important to publicize and socialize these busy work practices, as it can generate ideas, innovative alternatives in colleagues who have been practicing at the Tertiary level for a long time, but also provide tools to the middle level teachers. From our perspective it was a pleasure to discover that what we teach (to teach) served to construct concepts collectively and collaboratively, as well as to put into discussion and tension categories deeply rooted in our society. In particular, this experience was valuable because it passed the initial learning proposal designed for students of the Geography Faculty and was applied to a secondary school classroom in a subject of the area of Social Sciences, Citizen Education. This is where our pride in what has been achieved reaches its highest point, since what has been analyzed and studied in teacher education became an element of work with adolescents who were able to think and debate about poverty and the social myths that surround it.

The commitment to education is no longer a politically correct slogan or phrase when we implement new perspectives and tools to our daily pedagogical practices, in order to promote and improve the learning process of our young people significantly.

This perspective of teaching-learning-teaching-learning exposes this commitment in the training of young people who achieve active and responsible citizenship. Here is one of the great challenges of teaching Social Sciences and education for citizenship at any level of our educational system.

References

Bolívar A. (2005). "Where to place improvement efforts? Educational policy, school and classroom", *Education and Society Magazine*, Vol. 92, pp. 859–888, available online at: http://www.scielo.br/pdf/es/v26n92/v26n92a08.pdf.

Carretero Mario (2009). *Constructivism and Education*, Buenos Aires, Paidós.

Carretero Mario (2015). "The understanding and learning of the social sciences", *Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching Social Sciences and History*, FLACSO.

Carretero M. and Castorina J. A. (2010). *The Construction of Historical Knowledge*, Bs. As. Paidós.

Castorina J. A. (1998). "Piaget and Vygotsky: New arguments for a controversy", *Psychopedagogy Magazine*, pp. 9–26.

Castorina J. and Lenzi A. (1999). "The conceptual change in political knowledge: Approach to an explanatory model", *Latin Journal of Thought and Language*, p. 7.

Curriculum Design for Secondary Education: Construction of Citizenship: 1st to 3rd year/General Directorate of Culture and Education (2007). La Plata, General Directorate of Culture and Education of the Province of Buenos Aires.

Encrucijadas (2011). 51, University of Buenos Aires. Argentina.

Fairtein G. (2016). *Learning and Cognitive Change*, FLACSO Argentina.

Fullan M. and Hargreaves A. (1999). "The school we want: The objectives for which it is worth fighting", Good ones, Aires, Amorrortu.

Heargraves A. (2007). "Educational change: Between insecurity and the community", *Educational Proposal Magazine*, p. 27, Bs. As, FLACSO, available online at: http://www.propuestaeducativa.flacso.org.ar/entrevista.php?num=27.

Kliksberg Bernardo (2011). "Myths about poverty", *Encrucijadas Magazine*, Vol. 51.

Martínez M. (2014). "Discontinuities and ruptures: The transformations of the contemporary world", Social Transformations in the Contemporary World, Buenos Aires, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

Salomon G. (comp) (2001). *There Is No Distribution Without the Cognition of Individuals: A Dynamic Interactive Approach*, Buenos Aires, Amorrortu.

Siede Isabelino (2007). "Political education", *Essays on Ethics and Citizenship in School*, Paidós, Buenos Aires.