

Reflections on the Political Nature within the Teaching Practice: Novelty Teachers' Educational Experiences

Patricia Hermosilla

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Abstract

This research study focuses on the development of teachers' pedagogical knowledge. Its main objective is to comprehend the values, purposes and rationale that lie beneath teaching training programs. Therefore, the focal point of the present study is to examine the experiences that are often found in teaching practices. The methodology of this investigation follows an epistemological and interpretative perspective through the use of a biographical-narrative approach. In this regard, from the analysis of teachers' accounts it is expected to first, reflect on their educational experiences, second, weigh the meaning behind their daily teaching practices and interactions with students, and finally, extend on their experiences as teaching program students. For this purpose, the accounts of two secondary school teachers are portrayed. The findings reveal the complexity of the pedagogical practice as a reflective profession which, in turn, triggers moral, affective and political repercussions (Arnaus, 1999).

L'articolo presenta alcuni dei principali risultati di un'indagine centrata sul processo di costruzione del sapere dei docenti e dei professori principianti. Le finalità sono comprendere i valori, gli elementi determinanti e la tradizione di pensiero che orientano le loro pratiche educative come adulti in formazione. Al centro di questo studio c'è l'esperienza dei docenti. Seguendo questa priorità, l'indagine è orientata da una prospettiva epistemologica e interpretativa e impiega una metodologia biografica-narrativa. All'interno della singola narrazione di ciascun/a docente vengono approfondite le esperienze di formazione, i significati che vengono costruiti nella pratica quotidiana con i giovani nel contesto scolastico, e al tempo stesso, le riflessioni sull'esperienza della propria formazione universitaria. In questo contesto condividiamo le narrazioni di due docenti di scuola secondaria, che mostrano la complessità dell'insegnamento come una professione riflessiva, un ruolo che ha implicazioni morali, emotive e politiche (Arnaus, 1999).

Keywords: Teaching Practice; Educational Experiences; Complexity; Narrative; Politics.

Patricia Hermosilla: Universidad de Chile (Chile)

✉ p.hermosilla@u.uchile.cl

Patricia Hermosilla is a professor in the Department of Pedagogical Studies at Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades, Universidad de Chile. She teaches and trains high school teachers with different specializations. Her current areas of expertise are Theory of Education, Pedagogy and Curriculum. PhD in Pedagogy from Universidad de Barcelona, her research interests are related to teacher education, teachers' life paths and teachers' knowledge construction, life experience reflections lived by men and women who have answered in a personal, political and social way to the question why and what for they educate children and young people.

1. Theoretical Framework

As Sancho and Hernández (2014) point out, there is an extended tradition that tends to characterize the teaching practice as a weak profession, subordinated to knowledge produced by others and appointed to teachers for its use. From this perspective, teachers are represented as subjects with a low level of autonomy which is conducive to low levels of creativity, action capability and learning. From this perspective, teachers' knowledge is reduced to «know things» and apply «rules of actions». These narratives, that disempower teaching professionals, coexist. However, they also share space with other narratives that insist on viewing teachers as a “defining quality factor of teaching processes” (Pérez Gómez, Sola & Blanco y Barquín, 2004, p.127).

Considering this context, in which the teaching profession is undermined by the educational system, it seems critical to learn about teachers' knowledge experiences in order to identify the values, beliefs and creativity processes that emerge in this profession. It is important to highlight that these phenomena are directed related to their initial teaching training and, furthermore, cannot be detached from their individual experiences, their instruction or the relationship with their students.

It is of critical importance to consider that the teacher's training process is not a linear one and that it does not follow a sequential order. On the contrary, it is its reflective nature that allows people to resignify different episodes. In this regard, the image proposed by Larrosa (2003, p.115) helps us appreciate the impact of the pedagogical instruction:

Bildung could be understood as the idea that lies beneath the temporary process involving the shaping of an individual, the construction of their own identity, their humanity, or in other words, the transformation of their own self.

Considering this perspective, it seems crucial to carefully observe teachers' accounts since they reveal the acquisition of pedagogical knowledge through experience. In this sense, this aforementioned experience is neither previously defined nor it is exempted of failures, challenges or adversity. Precisely, those are the experiences that shape teachers' pedagogical practices, guide them in the process of solving questions, and help them identify the reasons that motivate them to educate youth.

It is not possible to deny the role that language and teaching practices has played on the devaluation of experience in the current educational setting. This reality seems evident in a society that over praises performance; phenomenon that is materialized in different ways for teachers and students. On this subject, it takes significant importance what Garcés (2013, p.92) proposes:

The challenge of any attempt of a critical pedagogy today is to give ourselves what to think. Considering the vast amount of information consumption, considering the emphasis given to the training of competences and abilities that satisfies the market's needs (...) today's great challenge is to grant ourselves the room and time to think.

That is precisely the opportunity we aim to provide with this study: the room and time to listen consciously to teachers' accounts so as to, in the first place, elucidate adult instruction and, in the second place, to comprehend students' interplay and school life. By acknowledging these distinctive experiences as manifestations of social action, we encounter what De Vita (2007, p. 20) proposes as practices of *social creation* in which “individuals are able to create knowledges and competencies in a movement inspired by the gathering of individuals instead of the capitalist appropriation of knowledges, which the capitalist pedagogy have us used to.”

We understand that these knowledge experiences are at stake in education, which is what Arendt (2003) identifies as the historical and social responsibility with youth, whom eventually will have to take responsibility for the world, their own identity and subjectivity.

2. Objective

The main purpose of the present study is to grasp and understand the construction process of pedagogical knowledge in teachers in terms of the values, purposes, and rationale that affect their practices at an initial stage of their professional careers.

3. Methodology

The following research is centered on experience. In order to address this priority, an interpretative epistemological perspective supports the study (Gadamer, 2003; 2004; 2007) that seeks singularity from the narrated experience, and a complex and idiosyncratic understanding (Huberman, Thompson & Weiland, 1997) of the meaning given by the subjects to their own knowledge. In accordance with this approach, we have decided to use a narrative and biographical methodology that according to Van Manen (in Bolívar, 2002), it is an expression that comes from the desire to return to those daily meaningful experiences.

By narrative, it is meant “a dense description” as referred to by Geertz (2005). On the one hand, it enables individuals to recall their lived experiences at school, and on the other hand, it encourages teachers to share them and learn from them, accepting that knowledge is not built mechanically, but it lies on the individual’s background and context. This is particularly meaningful for teaching due to the fact that it is assumed that teachers make decisions based on their reasoning schemes. Moreover, their practices are influenced by a series of representations rooted in their personal backgrounds, their educational experiences, the paradigms underlying their reasoning (Langford, 1998) and their professional performance within the school.

To serve this purpose, it is pivotal to highlight the methodological and interpretative importance and possibilities offered by teachers’ narratives. Reflective and intersubjective re-construction of the narratives shared by teachers has meant a great challenge on education research. All the accounts collected in the present work are by nature open, circumstantial and connected to the particular context in which they were elaborated. Additionally, it is relevant to point out that selecting a narrative methodology not only constitutes an epistemological option, but also a political one (Bolívar, Domingo & Cruz, 1998). This approach has enabled us to leave room for sharing reflections with teachers who are beginning their professional careers in contexts where the institutional and social settings respond to a technical-oriented and utilitarian view of education.

4. Findings

The depth of the future depends of the depth of the past. There is no imagination, enterprise or utopia without consciousness. From consciousness—biographical according to Damasio (1999)—a meaningful and purposeful future emerges. (Lopes, 2011, p. 25)

Lopes’ quotation reveals the significance of consciousness when it comes to elucidate the future. It also indicates the importance of envisioning the present which is the phenomenon that this study aims to examine. Through teachers’ narratives, it is possible to observe the relevance of the experiences they have stored in their memories and which, oftentimes, emerge in their classrooms. This process is part of what could be called an instruction journey which is always constructed from its uniqueness and burdened by uncertainty.

The teachers’ narratives used in this study, expose the influence of time when grasping the significance of the activities teachers perform on a daily basis. These narratives also evidence the critical importance of learning how to teach in a manner that will allow teachers to further their students’ learning processes. A key aspect in regards to their educational experiences, it is acknowledging the crucial role of relationship building with their students. In this sense, this relationship is based on accepting their students’ identities, expectations, beliefs, and being able to cherish their previous experiences. Considering teachers’ pedagogical instruction, they highlight the understanding they gain over time, as well as learning how to observe, perceive and think educational issues under the scope of ongoing reflection. This, in turn, represents a possibility to construct multiple interpretations and to assign meaning to experience. However, at the same time, they are able to explicit a more critical perspective of their training process in which they state how it did not fulfill their expectations.

In order to better portray the accounts of Sara and Carolina, both secondary school teachers in Chile, two sections will be presented so as to create a dialogue among them and the author of this research paper.

5. Learning how to become a teacher and committing to the teaching practice

Through both teachers' narratives we are able to understand the relationship that emerges between their decision to become teachers and the personal meaning they assign to their pedagogical duties. Both of them address episodes that consolidate their experiences. Furthermore, both teachers, without being exempted from challenges and conflicts, shape their pedagogical schemes in relation to their students.

6. Sara's experience: to give and give oneself time for building an educational relationship

Sara details the reasons that motivated her to teach:

I thought to myself even if I am not a teacher, why not trying? I like arts so obviously I wanted to encourage my students or anybody who was interested in arts. Then, I realized that through teaching, I would make possible for somebody to find an option in arts.

She started teaching in a small school that she initially depicted as an aggressive place with a series of deficiencies which clashed with her personal background. However, she was determined to make an attempt and see what the result would be. She was not going to quit easily.

She realized that throughout this process, one of her personal traits helped her handle the following:

Whenever I arrive at a new place, I prefer to wait some time to get used to it. It is just natural. It is something very intuitive. I always give myself more time, not excessively, but I've always done it. I had the feeling that first, it was necessary to get to know the place to understand how I could work there. Then, I was able to perceive that all the social relationships in that place were very complex. I realized that the place was shocking to me, it was a cultural shock as well [...] I believe that the most important part of my teaching training occurred there.

What she discloses in our conversation constitutes key aspects of Sara's experiences. On the one hand, she emphasizes the importance of time not only in the initial stage of her career, but also, according to her perspective, the critical importance time has in educational processes. On the other hand, she stresses the great value of schools as a space for teachers' development mainly based on day-to-day duties. In this sense, it is in that space where individuals display who they are, their beliefs, values, their ways to interact with students and their approach to knowledge.

It was a difficult beginning, and this is how she describes it:

I did not only struggle with my students in the classroom; our relation was tense and complex at moments. I also had difficulties dealing with the institution which constantly ordered me what to; most of it was meaningless and distant to me. It was a battle, so every day I walked around 20 minutes, wandering around, reflecting, recalling things, faces, words, answers and attitudes. I gathered all the images that one records during the day which allowed me to clear up my mind. Then, I had a realization: the aggressiveness expressed by my students was not because of me.

Taking the time to comprehend the dynamics of the relationships within the school—between students and the administration—allowed Sara to find out that her students' aggressiveness was not against her, but it was an element present in their lives and contexts. Although the aforementioned may seem obvious, it was not noticeable for her. This was certainly an important finding for Sara that helped her orient her teaching practice. This also allowed her to transform her concerns and fears into possibilities to rebuild relationships with her students to whom she is highly committed.

It is interesting to notice that time becomes an essential dimension for teachers' practices especially considering that it has been a traditionally diminished aspect in education. This is mostly due to approaches that seek to obtain results and achieve objectives as fast as possible, instead of promoting creativity (Hargreaves, 2003). Regarding the latter, Contreras y Perez de Lara (2010) affirm that—based

on Migliavacca (2002)—teaching practice is mostly enriched from having the possibility of living experiences, encountering others, and developing receptive capabilities. These competences enable individuals to practice active listening thus favoring the conditions that enhance communication.

7. The denial of acknowledging «the other» and Carolina's affirmation

By the time Carolina was working on her final dissertation she started wondering what would she do later on. Up until that moment, she had not considered becoming a teacher. She was conducting a time-consuming investigation on historical time. Simultaneously, she was working on the weekends as a cashier in a supermarket -position she hold for a year and a half. She details:

I did something that I should have done a long time ago. I started sharing more quality time with my family, especially my mom. She asked me to join her in a baking class in a community center in Renca. Since she only reached sixth grade in school, she was very overwhelmed by her lack of writing skills but she was extremely enthusiastic at the same time. So I went with her to help her write the recipes.

Back then, I lived two experiences that triggered a change. Beautiful things happened. I started helping the boys and girls who worked with me at the supermarket. They weren't older than 17. Simultaneously, in the baking class every time we baked I was told: «Carola, tell us a story». So I told many different stories. Mrs. Erika, who was the baking instructor and with whom I had great chemistry, used to tell me: «you should be a teacher» and I would ask: «but why?», «because you are generous. Maybe you can't notice that now».

These experiences started to make sense to Carolina. This was also related to her criticism towards the university, which according to her opinion, it is an institution that promotes a disconnect between knowledge and society. Coincidentally, she considered herself a beneficiary of the State as well as a privileged individual because of her possibility of getting an education. She believed that the knowledge she acquired had to be socialized which made her enter the teaching program. She adds: «I always thought that if there was something valuable to share, I had to do something about it.»

In Carolina's narrative, we found an episode that reveals a crisis in the relationship between her and her students. She refers to the beginning of the process as uneasy because «in a context such as the one I was – a private school- students had everything, which was shocking to me since I had experienced deprivation throughout my life. This turned out to be very aggressive.» The teacher defined the first stage of the process as a transit from denial to the acknowledgment of «the other».

She continues:

I was angry at them. I mocked them. I ridiculed them for the way they spoke. I was very demanding. I used to design very difficult tests and would tell them «If I could handle it under hard conditions, you can do it even four times better». I had reached a level of exigency that now I consider stupid, despicable, truly humiliating.

Their relationship started to change when she had the opportunity to carry out a research project with her twelfth grade students. She encouraged them to look at themselves –aggressively, she assumes though- by having them doing research on violence and pollution within the school. They held long debates in the classroom which, at times, dealt little with the contents suggested in the curriculum. In fact, she said «I felt as if life was passing by. It was like I had finally found the meaning of being there.» And she added:

I remember that once we saw a documentary about Doctors Without Borders who worked with children in northern Uganda—child soldiers, specifically—and one of the students stood up suddenly and said «I'm not interested in this because if I see it, I will have to take some responsibility for it and I don't care at all. I want to make money and this will not give me any. I don't want to get involved in this.»

In that moment, everything made sense to me. In fact, I feel moved whenever I recall this episode. I became aware of what I had done to them. I had pushed them to the furthest limit, and that was not fair at all. This definitely meant an opportunity for me to look inwards and realize of all the things I had done. As a consequence, a process of revelations began; I started to tell them my story. I told them where I came from, passages of my life; I told them about my house with plastic-covered windows and depicted them a context that they were not familiar with, not because they intentionally ignored it, but because their families had never told them about it.

I also realized that they were neither bad nor harmful people. It was their lack of experience that did not allow them to see and recognize the other and so did I. Moreover, they had not heard about other realities and contexts and in that moment I saw the purpose of my presence in that school. I thought that, after all the damage I may have provoked, they may not have interpreted as such, but they noticed the switch I made. I started changing my tests; I became more sympathetic and started listening to them.

Certainly, Carolina has experienced the first years of her career intensely, although she is aware that her own process may be not as dramatic as she describes it. In this regard, she says «it has been very intense to me, especially in emotional terms». She has had a high level of involvement with her students since the beginning of her story, and, eventually, she was able to see the value of opening up to them.

Carolina's narrative offers the possibility to grasp the complexity of the pedagogical relationship between –historical– human beings whose lives, as stated by Van Manen (1998, p. 38), “are still in course and therefore incomplete which implies that a good number of our vital stories cannot be integrated harmoniously.” As it is, students and teachers find themselves in the classroom experiencing the previously mentioned condition. Subsequently, it is of crucial importance the strengthening of the «pedagogical purpose» so as to transform relationships into an asset for the educational process.

According to the teacher, the relationship between her students started consolidating, generating gratitude and respect among them. In her own words, this corresponds to her own “reflective processes and the harmony I have been able to reach with them, personally and professionally.” This experience embraces dialogue and the possibility of making mistakes which promotes a pleasant classroom environment. As she says:

If I had to define what I give them, I would say passion for learning. I think they feel honored to have a dedicated teacher who motivates them. Secondly, trust. That means they can say if something is not fair or suitable. Personally, I think this has to do with the idea of encouraging students to learn, focusing on building horizontal relationships during the learning process. Now, they are more respectful to each other as they feel respected by me, and we agreed on not letting anybody insult others because it is not correct. Hence, I have also become aware of the importance of being careful with them class, for example if there is a student offending a classmate. There are many students who have told me their stories: how it felt like when a teacher offended them or had an inappropriate attitude towards them; just as it happened to me at the beginning. I would definitely not repeat it again, especially due to the collateral effects it has.

It was clear that as long as I did not recognize and validate my students, with all their features, strengths and weaknesses, I couldn't be able to build any relationship. Likewise, if they did not recognize me as a person who could be wrong and also be mistaken, but who can improve –and so can they- we would not have had the opportunity to build rapport. Due to this, I regularly asked myself questions such as «why is he looking at me?» «What did I do?» «Why is it so tense with this class?» «Why is this class no as tense as the previous one?» «What should I do to change this situation?» «What am I currently doing?» Asking myself these questions have helped me review and transform my teaching practice, and simultaneously, inviting my students to evaluate these changes by making questions such as «do you think this has been important?» or «Have you noticed this?» in order to continue with the educational processes, but based on a real-life interaction.

Devoting attention to the everyday aspect of the educational experience has permitted this teacher and her students to continue asking themselves questions that look for the meaning of the teaching practice. In this regard, Van Manen (1998, p. 39) asserts that “the pedagogical purposes are not only expressions of our own philosophical theories of life, but also of who we are and what we are made of, and how active and reflective is our attitude towards the world.”

8. Narratives about the initial stages of teaching training: an interval in the journey

The initial stage of the teacher training process represents a critical one. This is also reinforced by Cochran-Smith (2008 en Murillo 2012, pp.7–8) who deems this process a “key phase” in professional development:

First, a teacher training program that pursues social justice will not focus on methods or definite tasks. On the contrary, it will be centered on a more coherent and intellectual approach that recognizes the political and social contexts in which teaching takes place, as well as the struggles present in both.

Secondly, teaching and teacher training are inherently political and ideological activities since they involve ideas, ideals, power and access to learning, but also to opportunities in life.

Thirdly, teacher training is pivotal in the process of learning how to teach and becoming an agent seeking to change education. Special attention should be paid to teachers’ beliefs and perspectives since these will partly influence what they learn in their respective teaching programs.

Finally, a social justice oriented approach in teacher education should be offered to all candidates aiming to become teachers, mainly because they and their students are part of the same diverse nation, and will therefore, contribute to imagine a more fair society, and consequently, the construction of it.

This passage allows us to identify fundamental aspects of the teacher training process which emphasize a social justice approach that will shape how education and educational issues are understood. The author recognizes that this process is not only about methodological approaches or the activities that emerge from it. Instead, she emphasizes teaching as an activity that is neither unbiased nor objective and that it takes place in a politicized social context. In this regard, teaching is closely related to the learning processes and opportunities of individuals. Thus, these educational instances have multiple possibilities in which each participant is offered the chance to transform the society they are part of.

9. Reflection as a challenge to transform memory into a live experience

Sara decided to pursue the teaching program when several aspects converged. On the one hand, her family had the resources that allowed her to do so and also because she had the urgent need of deepening the experiences she had had up until now. She explained that the conversations that took place during her training interested her, however she is also able to scrutinize the process:

I can’t deny the fact that I am part of the system. I received a biased education. So I had been exposed to different experiences, but at the same time you start this new process [her training process] where everything is dealt from an antihegemonic perspective that favors transformation. Simultaneously, you observe that this transformation is not only at a discourse level but you have to experience it in schools. And unfortunately, I never had the room to socialize those experiences.

As a product, she was very confused and unable to understand what she was undergoing. On the one hand, she could not overlook her previous experiences. And on the other hand, the authors she was studying had nothing to do with the reality lived in schools:

The authors were too disconnected in theoretical and idealistic terms. School life is completely different and there are circumstances in which urgencies emerge. Those emergencies precede theory and that has to be taken into consideration when interacting with students. There is something human, something animated in each classroom, and each group which is not considered in the literature.

During the conversation, it is possible to observe how dissatisfied she is about her training process. In her analysis, she insists on the detachment between experience and the literature. This criticism, however, becomes a necessary and natural practice because it involves a systematic revision of teachers, classmates and authors' points of view. On this subject, Van Manen (1998, p.25) asserts that "education has to turn to the realm of experiences. The author emphasizes, experience can lead to an understanding that reorders a sense of personified knowledge."

Sara, from her current experience working only half-time at a university, realizes the importance of allocating time to reflective practices. This so as to systematize the learning processes that take place in the pedagogical practices. She considers that this exercise is not possible in schools due to their daily contingencies. She declares:

Reflective processes are not achieved mainly because schools consume your energy and exhaust you. Moreover, one is usually involved in activities that go beyond teaching; there are family activities, and many other things that start adding up. So I have realized that there are several experiences that I only have. I never shared them, wrote them or read them again. They are only present in my memory.

She adds: in the memory of my living experiences, so here [meaning the university] I have realized that it is critical for teachers to have the opportunity to systematize their experiences in a piece of writing. This way, ideas can be organized and one can notice what is really happening. In my experience, everything was very intuitive because I did not have the training I needed.

The teacher declares that her training did not help her to rethink the work she had done in previous years. During that process, however, she acknowledges having the valuable support of a colleague with whom she worked in her first school. As of now, she is able to indicate that the research skills -such as writing- she acquired during her training, helped her to foster reflective abilities and to appreciate the value of systematizing those processes.

According to her analysis, there is an urgent need of a supporting teachers in the development of research skills so as to allow the emergence of richer perspectives of different processes: «teaching is so alive, so dynamic, so constantly changing». Remarks that we interpret as a means for Sara to highlight the complexities of teaching as well as the uncertainty and subjectivity of the pedagogical practices and, also, the investigation it requires.

We understand that the possibility of reflecting on her pedagogical objectives within the classroom is the reason behind her current activities at the university. This, in turn, also suggests why she could not go back to teaching at schools. She states:

If I went back to teaching in schools, something would eventually die again «(...) It would die, for instance, the clarity I gained by not being only in schools. It would die the possibility of dialogue around pedagogical knowledges, and it would be more difficult to build something new. There is a lot of pressure, the institution is overwhelming.»

This is a key argument that will serve us to initiate a deeper understanding of the schools Sara knows. These institutions, that provide opportunities for some but that at the same time ignore others, dictate the way in which teachers engage in dialogue and the experiences they share with students.

10. The shortcomings of teaching training in light of the complexity of educational practices

Carolina openly acknowledges that during her initial educational exposure she learned how to reflect upon her pedagogical experiences. During that time, this practice became the means she had to fill in the gap in the weak areas of her training. It is also possible to observe throughout her accounts that she is highly committed to her work and her students. On this subject, she addresses three occasions which she identifies as critical for her teaching activities.

The teacher recalls that during her classes -Professional Training I and II- she confirmed her calling to become a teacher. She says, «I realized that there was something I could give and that that could be meaningful». Her teaching internships were in two different institutions which allowed her to obtain rich and gratifying experiences:

One of those instances took place in a deprived socioeconomic context, in an institution that did not believe in their students' capabilities. The other school, understood education as an opportunity for social mobility so it was somewhat snobbish and pretentious. There, the girls were more like me, they came from endangered social contexts and school was their only option. Otherwise, they would not have had the opportunity to get an education. Most of them were good students from early on, thus, there was a very distinct environment.

Another evident aspect regarding her account is the critical view she holds on the didactic method she gained -or missed- during her teaching instruction. Because of this, once she graduated she pursued a diploma on didactic methods in order to explore the nuances of history as both someone who teaches and learns.

On this subject, she declares:

I don't think it's fair when a university shatters a newly discovered dream. That's the reason I decided to continue studying so as to better my practices. Clearly my current processes are very different from the ones at the beginning. This can be seen in the type of courses I have taken. At first, I took history classes as well as religion studies, Greek studies, didactic methods, and later on one on evaluation. I also took one on humanities and, currently, I am pursuing a Masters in Informatics. My academic journey has been closely related to my background and the experiences I have lived.

Because of the constant issues that emerge in a classroom and the need of acquiring the tools she did not obtain during her training, she has been forced to continue her studies. She exemplifies this situation by referencing a narrative workshop she pursued and that greatly interested her. However, she observes that the work this class implied was such as the one a person would follow in a dissertation with a dense theoretical framework. According to her perspective, this is not useful without a methodology since it is disconnected from reality. In this regard she asserts:

I think that because of my ways people may think that I am a technocrat. But that is not the case. I have been able to manifest my practices with my students, mainly because of those technical components that are usually undermined. For me, for example, to formulate a question properly in a test is fundamental because it allows my students to monitor their progress.

Her remarks are very interesting since they unveil the importance she assigns to reflective processes. This ability was acquired during her training and it has helped her to contemplate the aspects she needs to improve in her classroom practices. It has also conducted the development of a more critical perspective of what is needed in teaching training programs. In this sense, she may have been able to ask herself the same questions she is currently asking, which, may have prevented her from all the trial and error instances she experienced with her students.

On this subject, it is pertinent to question whether this would be possible in teaching practices where experimentation is required. In other words, daily interactions and experiences are needed in any educational endeavor in spite of the fact that there are no certainties of students' awareness and learning

processes. In this regard, Van Manen (1997, p.31) asserts that “even as a theoretical discipline, pedagogy is a practical exercise.”

Unquestionably, we cannot disregard what Carolina describes as a lack of understanding of her teaching practices. She has had to work extremely hard to perform her teaching duties successfully. From her perspective, this is not a mandatory process for those who have had a deficient training. Thus, she questions herself, “How do we reach an optimal training?”

Thus, Schön (1992, p.196) claims that:

Adopting a constructivist approach in any career allows us to comprehend professionals as craftsmen: their cultural baggage provides them structures that enable them to formulate coherent ideas about things and instruments. This way they impose their representations on different aspects of their practices. From this perspective, a professional, just like an artist, is a creator of things.

Considering our perspective, the author portrays the complexity and the challenges that lie beneath the great responsibility of teaching -and that Carolina completely assumes. At the same time, teaching involves a certain degree of autonomy in order to engage in reflective processes. It also requires the development of technical resources within a particular context. Thus, through the creation of educational instances, learning emerges.

11. Discussion

Experience is an action, a passage. (...) the storyline of the instruction narrative is an adventure that is not regulated by any predetermined objective, or by any goal (Larrosa, 2003, p.128)

There are a few issues about our reflection that we would like to discuss in a greater depth. To begin with, the significance of the teachers’ narratives about their educational experiences, the events they encountered in their university years and, also, the first years of their careers. All of these elements contribute to the framing and understanding of the learning and teaching processes that are part of the current debate on educational challenges (McEwan y Egan, 1998). These issues also help us to think about social justice in education.

Maturana and Varela (2009) affirm that knowledge is not a representation of the world but it is rather a continuous process of constructing the world through life anecdotes. The authors’ perspective constitutes an evidence in regards to the narratives of the teachers that participated in this study. In this sense, they are constantly building their understandings and knowledges through their classroom experiences; processes that we understand as being part of their instruction. This phenomenon is understood from the appreciation that teaching training cannot be reduced to a single moment of their career or to the educational spaces they inhabit, but instead, it is about an ongoing process of retrospective redefinition (Larrosa, 2003).

Regarding their experiences as university students, the teachers voice criticism towards the institution which reveals the limitations of what was offered in this space. However, and in spite of this negative evaluation, they admit acquiring -in that period- the tools that enable them to engage in reflective practices; reflection that is currently part of their regular educational tasks. Hence, this practice allows them to contextualize their decision-making processes inside the classroom which can be seen, for instance, in the creation of ties with their students.

For Sara, the possibility of building relationships is directly related to the time she allocates to get to know their students, to the willingness of listening to them and to actually taking the time to observe classroom interactions. Caramés (2006, p. 124) states that by giving time to relationships, we are able as educators “to do something else than observing as outsiders, or to provide guidance following predetermined techniques proposed in manuals. Allowing time to flow in the practice of educational relationships makes me think about that place educators use; because they are not using the place of the other, or taking an outsider perspective, but that they are rather facilitating it.” In other words, it is a *mediated relationship* that requires time for its construction.

This experience interplays with Carolina's narratives -who shares her transformation from not acknowledging her students to accepting them as the others. As a teacher, she cannot deny their condition as individuals with a history and context and, also, as individuals who expect something from her in the classroom. To her, this transition entailed a personal introspection which allowed her to relocate herself from her history and context in the educational relationship -just as it occurs in any other human interaction.

Garcés (2013, p. 92) states that:

It is important to understand that to give ourselves the possibility of thinking is not necessarily about promoting a contemplative attitude or to protect ourselves in a new intellectualism. On the contrary, it is about learning how to be touched, about defying the indifference that shapes us as consumers-spectators of what is real. We start to think when the issues that we know (or don't know) affects how we relate to things, to the world, and to others. In order to do so, courage is needed and this audacity is cultivated through affective relations with others. This is the fundamental experience that can ultimately change our relation with the world and its ways of domination, each time more intimate and subjective.

Garcés' viewpoint is critical considering our condition of consumers and spectators. It is also relevant when he discusses the relation between thinking and «love» relationships among people as an emerging possibility to transform our lives. This statement is as powerful as the way teachers address the relationship they have with their students and the central role it has on the educational experience. This is an experience of human nature where it is necessary to replace the fear of being left aside or failing for the ability of being able to listen, to dialogue, to respect, and to embrace the possibility of making mistakes and associating with other things through the mere pleasure of learning; all aspects that have been mentioned by the teachers throughout their narratives.

We agree with Chul Han's (2017, p.56) statements about how the neoliberal system "eliminates stable structures within time in order to increase the productivity that fragments lives (...). This temporal and neoliberal politics generates fear and insecurity. Neoliberalism individualizes men turning them into an isolated businessman of themselves." This context clearly requires courage and determination, qualities that both Sara and Carolina show in the resignification of their educational experiences (Arnaus y Pérez de Lara, 1994).

Political and personal action allows the acknowledgment of the value and unyielding singularity of each human life illustrating the richness of the educational practice and the symbolic worlds of teachers. This phenomenon is unquestionably a contribution to the social creation because as Freire (2013, p.148) states, "dialogue is the possibility I have to, when opening to the thinking of others, do not perish in isolation."

At the same time, the teachers' narratives allows us to ask ourselves about the "pedagogical influence" that Van Manen (1994, p.33) refers to as having the "ability to respond," "one acts in a very responsible manner, thus morally justifiable and defensible from any perspective, structure or pedagogical rationality."

As Freire states, being aware of the fact that "teaching requires to comprehend that education is a form to intervene the world. (...)." Reflection in which the author evidences a complex and paradoxical relationship in education for which it is fundamental that teachers construct pedagogical knowledge committed to justice. This is what Lee (2016) characterizes as interrelated principles that he identifies, among others, as the ability to care about others and to be compassionate, to respect people's points of view and to lean towards accepting diversity.

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