

TOWARDS A *CLINICAL DIDACTICS* IN TEACHERS' EDUCATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyze the subject Educational Psychology taught in teachers' formation course through the perspective of *clinical didactics*. The expression *clinical didactics* refers to a new approach of the school teaching framework in which the term *didactics* may be understood as a systematic reflection and search for alternatives applicable to the problems at the teaching practice and the term *clinical* is understood in its broadest sense, compared with the traditional psychology clinical model, which has been going through changes due to the experiences of reinvention and recreation of its expression. The results indicate that the postures based on *clinical didactics* can contribute to improve the education of students, teachers in ongoing formation, to face the features of a classroom inserted in a school in today's world.

Keywords: Clinical Didactics; Educational Psychology; Teachers' Education.

INTRODUCING THE CONCEPT OF *CLINICAL DIDACTICS*

A certain word sleeps in the shade of a rare book.

How to free it from enchantment?

It is life password, the world password. I will search for it. (...)

I keep on searching, and my search will be my word.

(Andrade, 1967)

The purpose of this article is to analyze the school subject Educational Psychology taught in teachers' formation course through the perspective of *clinical didactics*. Keeping that in mind, it features and extends the idea that the teachers' previous education in Psychology stamps psychological marks that influence their practices, the objectives and contents of the subject Educational Psychology in a Teaching License Degree courses designed to form new teachers, in our country.

The questions that gave rise to this analysis were and still are common among professionals in the field of Educational Psychology. What, from psychology, shall be taught to future teachers? Have the current contents of the subject Educational Psychology been contributing to future teachers' practice? How can this knowledge be developed by the Educational Psychology teacher in the Teaching License Degree courses, so that it actually brings contribution to the teachers' formation? Furthermore, and essentially, do these teachers, majored in psychology, outline their practices in a different way because of their formation in Psychology? How?

Therefore, we understand that the object of this reflection is the teachers' action in the subject Educational Psychology. We intend to highlight that the teacher is the focus of this study - the Educational Psychology teacher in a teachers' License Degree Courses. And it is on this teacher and on their practices in the subject that we want to focus.

In order to reach the objectives of this article we shall present topics that deepen the reflection on the possibility of teaching the contents of the subject both didactically and clinically. *Clinical didactics* is the core concept in this study. But, what comes to be *clinical didactics*? Would it be a teaching procedure that may answer the question of how we can be teachers in a Teaching License Degree course, in addition to being psychologists, without taking the risk of overdoing and simultaneously exercising the attributes of psychotherapists?

A text by Baibich (2003) on her studies about the formation of the Psychology teacher encouraged our initiatives to debate on this topic. It was also the very first starting point to study the theoretical debate approaching the procedures to teach Educational Psychology in a Teaching License Degree course. In her text, the author argues that the teacher should adopt *clinical didactics* in his/her classroom, regarding that either the clinical attitude or the attitude to promote transformation in the classroom are Psychology teachers' legitimate actions.

THE RESEARCH: *CLINICAL DIDACTICS* IN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY?

In order to carry out a theoretical review we turned to authors who can assist us to reflect on Educational Psychology and we sought for background to form the conception of the subject and the world which we work with. We have also turned to those theorists who can help us better understand the teachers' formation models. To carry out the field research, we longed to describe the steps that were developed and the results based on the obtained information which indicates that Educational Psychology teachers apply throughout their practices what we are herein calling *clinical didactics* when working with their students, in-progress teachers.

The theoretical basis

Initially, it is important to theorize about a first point concerning the Educational Psychology as a syllabus subject and, in order to do so, two study prospects are required. On the one hand, we ought to deepen into our understanding of the Educational Psychology and its relation with Psychology and Education, moving through the Psychology of Teaching. Coll (1999) is the reference author in this debate. On the other hand, Coll shows the displacement of the *psychology applied to education* towards the concept of *educational psychology* functioning as a bridge-subject. In our research realm, when defining which concept we would deal with, we tended, as much as Coll, to consider it as a bridge-subject linking Psychology and Education. Thus, we consider it as a specific subject, which has its own object and aims to generate new knowledge about this object.

In a second point of the theoretical foundation, we have brought the context of Educational Psychology, developing a better study of the world and the citizens living in it. We found in Vigotski the concept of subject we work with, and devised the world in which these subjects live and their relations, as we presume that it is in this universe that both, current teachers - the subjects of our research - interact with their students and these latter - when graduated teachers in their future lives - will deal with their own students. So, we studied this in Lahire (2002), and his conception of plural subject, and also other authors such as Lipovetsky (1989) and Bauman (2003), who reason that we live in a *liquid* or *disorganized* society, and tell us about a certain weakness and vulnerability of personal partnerships at present times. Concerning the school in which we teach and learn, we have decided to approach, based on a more sociological point of view, how the school, teachers, students, principals can interact among themselves in today's world? How the world of relationships is being apprehended by all of them, according to Bauman (2003), reaffirming the disposability of human beings and their increasingly weakened interactions, and among them, we ponder over the partnerships involving teachers-students, students-students and teachers-school managers. As in the contemporaneous world, social relations inside the school environment seem to be characterized by fluidity and frailty of human bonds.

How to prepare and provide teachers with formation to work in this scenario? That is why, we visualized the need to study, among the several dimensions of the teaching-learning process happening within the school, such a dimension that we long to designate as socio-affective and, for which, we have turned to Vigotski (1998), Wallon (1971) and Dantas (1992) who studied Wallon for whom the education of emotion must be included among the purposes of the pedagogical action. Here we start debating the relationship between reason and sensibility in the teacher's education, which we found in Campos (2003) in a biographical text about Helena Antipoff.

Concerning the teachers' formation to work in these dimensions, at this school, we read authors such as Schön (2000), Diniz-Pereira (2007), Torres (1998), Tardif (2004) and Freire (1996). We studied the "model 3 +1", which is criticized by several authors despite being used in our country since the creation of the Teaching License Degree Courses in the 30s. Complying with this model, the pupils study for three years the subjects of specific contents from their original courses and, thereafter, they study the pedagogical subjects that make up the Teaching License Degree course for the period of one year. Concerning the models used

in the teachers' education, we have approached the technical rationality model, the practical rationality model from Schön, as well as the critical rationality model.

And then we reach the third point of this theoretical basis: the teaching of Educational Psychology to form teachers. In this section, we raise the discussion on the articulation of theory and practice, and find support in Schön (2000) with the concept of *indeterminate zones of practice* or *uncertain zones of practice* which are rather helpful to our arguments. But we do not fail to add to that the study of the later criticism upon him, made by equally important authors, and discuss other possibilities of *reflective teaching*. In Vigotski, (2004) we also find this interaction between school and life and we take it beyond the boundaries of a teacher's education in the pursuit of another rationality, sensitive and humane, that could prepare the teachers to carry out practical work, but also prepare them emotionally for this meeting with professional life.

We discussed how the teaching action is held - in terms of practices and contents - in Educational Psychology, seeking to better distinguish the practice that would be called *clinical didactics* as originally stated in Baibich (2003). We define what we understand for *didactics*; what we understand for *clinical*, in its broad sense, compared to traditional clinical model in Psychology; and what we have named *beaconing elements*, which are present in the psychologist's professional routine. We have studied the *model of the sensitive rationality* proposed by Bragança (2009). We understand that the authors propose contents that are built based on the *problematization of the reality*, constructed from the psychological theories.

The field research itinerary

Case study was the type of methodology used. It has a unique character, but we emphasized that the process gathered from an individual or a group can be generalized, because despite being unique it contains the social totality and can reveal something constitutive of other subjects who also live in similar situations. (Aguar, 2001). The subjects were six Educational Psychology teachers from the Faculty of Education (FAE) of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), in Brazil.

Observations were carried out in six classes of Educational Psychology adding up to a total of ninety hours of observation in classroom, which were recorded in details in a field notebook. We also performed two individual interviews with each of the teachers of these classes; they were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The first interview was held in the school term after the observations had been carried out. When systematizing the information from the first interview, some new issues arose and, therefore, we outlined the proposal for a second interview which was named as interview for shared analysis together with the teachers of the subject with the primary objective to look for more answers to the key question in the research, namely, determine whether the teachers' previous formation in psychology changes their teaching procedures when teaching Educational Psychology in the Teaching License Degree courses. Therefore, in this second interview, the data obtained in the observations and in the first interview were analyzed together with the teachers.

In order to analyze the information we created a system to order the information in a pre-analysis or descriptive analysis, displaying them in descriptive tables in which some indicators were listed based on significant issues for the object of the research. To carry out the interpretative analysis, we developed some texts synthesizing all the notes on the summary tables which were treated with some elements from the discourse analysis (Orlandi, 2003), to identify common themes, their frequency and importance, with the aim to translate them into categories, considering their grade of importance and their connection to the key question which oriented the whole process of analysis: *the fact that the teacher holds a formation in psychology alters their practice to teach Educational Psychology in the Teaching License Degree Courses ? Does it contribute to the goals of the subject? Does it enrich the contents?*

Results and discussion

During the course of the research we asked whether teachers let the psychological marks be present in their teaching action to form teachers for the basic education. We found an answer: the teachers' previous formation in Psychology influences their practices, the objectives and the contents when teaching Educational Psychology in Teaching License Degree courses. The results indicate that these teachers do, though timidly, what we have denominated *Clinical Didactics*, evidenced by the psychological influences present in their teaching action. This is because:

The teachers, actually, turned out to us as "a crystal that viewed from different angles reflects different colors without, however, failing to be a crystal - they are seen and see themselves in different positions." (Baibich, 1989:23).

Concerning the institution, the teaching licensure degree and the classes we detected problems that have already been considered as obvious in our country and we can sum them up by saying that they are no longer attractive courses and people do not want to be teachers. However, we advanced a bit further and noticed that the Teaching License Degree courses are by far demanding urgent changes in their syllabus framework as well as in their subjects which do not interact with each other, the contents are outdated and the training programs ought to be reprogrammed. We also noticed that the issue is not to change the long time existing four subjects as they are subjects actually legitimate, always present and current in the national scenario concerning teachers' education. We do not mean to suggest that the subjects are replaced, nevertheless, we do believe changes have to be made within them, that is, in their form and content. Taking into account the content and the form of these subjects, the way they are developed, involving heterogeneous classes and, based in various aspects, with a significant diversity of students, we have realized that it is legitimate to ponder about what Bragança (2009) brings us about the rationality in which, we have noticed, we are still working. This rationality has not been able to give emphasis to life and to the existential complexities of the diversity of subjects-students, which, we presume, can be best lived in a formation based on a more human dialogical and sensitive rationality.

The subject Educational Psychology was thoroughly discussed with the teachers, who, considering it in its current framework, told us about some of the issues that we have stated: (i) a demand, both, theoretical and practical, of a teaching action more focused on interdisciplinarity. One cannot deny that: Psychology by itself, is not enough to deal with all the issues of the educational phenomenon and problems found therein. The interdisciplinarity would better highlight the need to share the various types of knowledge to deal with the educational issues in a more wisely manner; (ii) its almost hegemonic characterization as a lighter subject, a subject that does not burden the students with hard-working tasks. And that leads us to believe that it is because we are dealing with a subject that holds as content the subjects themselves, it approaches the students as subjects, and whatever comes from themselves in the theories, and this, in our view, is still insufficiently worked out; (iii) on the other hand, the physical environment makes us have a different thinking. In contrast to the lightness of the subject, the classroom layout, *always circular*, to always make the word circulate, here, in our view, much more than in other subjects, due to the manner teachers with their psychological marks rooted in their teaching activities make use of the classroom environment. Due to the listening they offer, the sensitive look driven towards, due to the clinical attitude they adopt to make the student speak out, express their experience and, furthermore, theorize it in their own way, in their uniqueness. All of this allowed by the understanding and practices learnt previously, from the psychologists-teachers; (iv) we also restate here what the teachers say about the subject, which has to be theoretical, because of its role as a subject of fundamentals. But not confined to theoretical boundaries! Therefore, it runs the risk of being restricted to vain attempts, according to the teachers, to apply concepts that, away from the classroom, from practices, are reduced to concepts of General Psychology, rather than being a subject with its own characteristics, that is, a bridge-subject that really links Psychology and Education, in the come-and-go between theory and practice, and the come-and-go, lastly, between these two fields of knowledge.

And how about the classes when this subject is taught? Concerning the contents, we have found that Psychology has an authentic contribution in the teacher's education. We learnt about syllabus that, impelled to the teachers, reigns as object of guidance for certain contents and theories, as the teachers told us. But we also saw how they change this syllabus - object of guidance - into object of subversion, subverting that order, with the inclusion of contemporary topics that permeate through these contents and make the difference, updating these theories. On the other hand, in our analysis, we realized that the universe of topics is so diverse that there is a serious hazard of becoming banal, and neither the theory proposed in the syllabus, from classic theorists, nor the themes/demands created based on the everyday experience reach a satisfactory level of development.

We saw that the goals of psychological knowledge in the teacher's education, in the spoken by teachers, intend to explain the human dimension of the subjects who their students will work with, in the future. We saw, however, that the objectives of psychological knowledge in the teacher's education, the unspoken but possible to be read between the lines of the teaching action, requires from the Educational Psychology teachers to go further and announces the necessity to aim at working out the subjects-students' own human dimension. Thus, in the teaching of Psychology, with the proposal of forming new teachers we propose to

approach distinguished contents and goals. Teaching Educational Psychology through the exercise of reflection-in-action, work, in terms of content, for example, with the formation of the *subjects-students - future teachers* to be, in fact, helpful so that these workers can face the challenges of their profession.

But how can one do all of this? What have we gathered from the practices developed towards this content? We attended classes, some more other less participative; the exhibition of movies and/or documentaries, the presentation of guided studies; we listened to reports concerning workshops and case studies; attended several essay presentations carried out by students in several formats, seminars, presentations with external panelists, with theatrical performances and presentation and debate of texts. We applauded visiting teachers who were invited by the hosting teachers because we enjoyed their lectures... Here we have described a diverse synthesis, but at many moments we wondered and noticed how few were the novelties brought within this diversity. New (and distressing) was the surprise to realize that, despite all the diversity, whilst a class, everything was very much the same...

However, we may have different thoughts. The issue can be displaced from a status made of a single set of diverse collective or individual practices, to a status made of complexity and uniqueness expressed in the practices carried out by the teachers who are psychologists. In this status which is made by using clinical guidance, which constantly questions the issues and the subjects - "living creatures" - (Pereira, 2012), but which is also made by being a teacher. From this very same status, in our view, the teachers can see themselves less destitute of theoretical and practical means which they would have in hand to assess situations that arise in the classroom – a meeting space - and think strategies for actions which may(why not?) be based in this knowledge of theirs.

For all this, we began to understand the oscillation, as in a pendulum, of the teaching activities carried out by the teachers in the search for a balance in their movements.

As a pendulum, the teachers range from encouraging the students' active participation and the maintenance of their own leadership, movements expressed in a relationship between the teacher and students seeking, in a mutual journey, to contribute fundamentally to the teaching-learning in a constructive way.

As a pendulum, the teachers come-and-go in actions from theory to practice, looking forward to answering the issue of how to better establish this relationship looking for the different interconnections we may observe in classrooms. In these interconnections, teachers brought new ideas, which we understand here, come forward attempting to fight back what Vigotski (2004) denounces as the mold and the stagnation of our schools, which, according to the author, resulted from the fact that the windows were air tightly closed and "closed, first of all, in the soul of the own teacher" (p. 457). In order to create a practical part in the subject - if the teacher had more time beyond the sixty hours/semester, which all of them believe to be insufficient; bring the already graduated student back to school, after the professional practice, back to the Educational Psychology subject to work out their conflicts which come from this classroom confrontation; leave out definitely the classroom space at the Education Faculty (FaE) and give their classes at elementary schools; consider changing the syllabus into a new one which could handle all these elements ... are some of the new ideas.

As a pendulum, the teachers range from the flexibility of time/assessments and the accuracy of the norms, moments for the debate of these concrete elements, but which the personal partnerships made evident in them, symbolic elements, in their weaknesses, fragility and vulnerability, ways in which we currently live these partnerships.

We did not create and listed these and other elements brought into scene in this text. We just leave here the registers, coming from the voices and practices of the teachers themselves who told us and showed us their doings and then led us to search for new ways for the definitions of a distinguished practice which was shown to us.

CONCLUSIONS AND CONTINUITIES: SEARCHING FOR THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF CLINICAL DIDACTICS

Our results, therefore, reaches *beyond the principle of content-form*, as, in the voice of these teachers and their teaching action, we have noticed that they herald that one should work in another perspective. We saw that, in addition to interconnecting content and form, using different strategies that can bring the reality to the

classroom or lead the licensee to the practice, this reality must be worked out in what it causes to the person who comes in contact with it. There is no doubt that by making the classroom a "living classroom", as highlighted by the teachers, they are exposed to other risks which they have to deal with, becoming, in our view, a complex task, as it brings onto the surface the subject who lives and will deal with this reality and with their own questions.

But what we have been seeing and which was also announced in the teachers' discourse is that the risk must be taken, as a contribution from Psychology is required, which, using its strategies, can form the subject and the demands that arise from that, around their personal formation towards the professional practice. The teachers are, although timidly, already doing that and make it known, by tracking this way towards different ways to perform, holding psychological elements or background, which may be identified, for example, in the teachers' practice who tell us about a *qualified listening*, both towards the collective of students and towards each one individually; who describe and practice a *sensitive sight* towards the students; who state to have *skills* to deal with groups and for that reason practice it in the class; who talk about *flexibility* required to assist the variety of subjects-students based on the knowledge they hold on Psychology and Educational Psychology; who make an educational effort to bring to the classroom experience - artificial space - a bit of life experience, making it into a living classroom, in the interconnections of issues that they raise; and that, at last, seek for completeness in the teaching and learning issue, in the relations also mediated by the *dimension of affection* and closeness they experience in this relationship.

These elements or the psychological background in teaching action lead to the development of a differentiated practice that, in our view, is already quite clear in these teachers' performance, but still, like a pendulum, oscillate from one to another posture, seeking for the equilibrium in their pendulum movements, around a still point, the Educational Psychology subject. At the conclusion of the research, we present an idea and a discussion that we are extending to a deeper understanding of the concept, called here the *Clinical Didactics*, searching, also in pendulum movement, the balance between the clinics and the didactics.

On one side of the pendulum, is the *didactics* which is understood as systematic reflection and search for alternatives to the problems of the pedagogical practice, but considering it with the political sense. Therefore, we have sought to go beyond the notion of didactics which, in most cases, is treated as a collection of technical and instrumental aspects of how the teacher should organize and develop the teaching of a specific content. Doubtlessly, it is important to consider these aspects. Without them we cannot teach. However, today, there are advances and different conceptions about didactics which see it, further beyond that, treating the "how to teach" from the point of view of critical understanding of the relationship between society-man-education. Analyzing it from the implicit point of view, may develop in the student (and the student him/herself) for a critical view of the world and its transformation.

On the other side of the pendulum, we find the *clinics*, here understood in its broad *sense*, compared to the traditional clinical model of psychology, which has been undergoing transformations, by experiences of reinvention and recreation of its expression. We also believe that this notion of extended clinic reveals that to act clinically means not only to deal with the psychological reality of the subject, but deal with the network of subjectivity that surrounds him/her, which implies not only an interiority, but all forms of externality that are presented to the subject.

Looking forward to answers to the initial issue whether the *clinical didactics* "would it be a teaching action that may answer the question of how we can be teachers in a Teaching License Degree course, in addition to being psychologists, without taking the risk of overdoing and simultaneously exercising the attributes of psychotherapists?" we are prone to think that, in the expanded clinical perspective, the clinical didactics in the classroom would be even beyond the reflections that the psychotherapist assumes in his clinical experience. It is to enable the subject to move in the individual realm (as a person) and in the collective one (as a future professional), strengthening its capacity to criticize, at the same time, the social reality and him/herself, in this reality.

At last, we believe that Educational Psychology teachers, when developing the practice of *Clinical Didactics*, influence, in different ways, the preparation of future teachers, to face the classroom, within the school of today's world.

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