SOME ASPECTS OF LIFE STORIES FOUND IN TEACHING PROPOSALS OF TEACHERS FROM THE NATIONAL POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

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Abstract

Some aspects of life stories of teachers from the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN), which influenced their educational proposals, are reported. This study is part of the IPN project 20164811. The methodology followed is qualitative. The aspects of life stories that were explored were: their motivations to be in teaching, their thoughts about their possible foray into teaching, their perceptions of their teachers and how they started in teaching (formally or informally). The results show that teachers who conceived themselves as teachers have achieved greater flexibility in the search for new educational proposals in order to achieve better learning outcomes in students, resulting in greater personal satisfaction; while teachers who are teaching without having assumed themselves as teachers have more difficulties to make educational proposals and when they make some, they give them less continuity, plus they are more superficial. Apparently, the needs of these teachers are targeted to areas other than the classroom, and rather maintain their teaching methods without modification. The study exposed the need to know what strategies continue in teacher training to promote change in teachers who, due to their histories, have difficulty developing teaching strategies.

Keywords: Life stories, educational proposals, high education teachers.

1 INTRODUCTION

The life stories of teachers have recently become a topic of interest in educational research. According to Lopez de Maturana [1] knowing them would systematize, from within schools and their contexts, the transcendental contribution that pedagogical practices of teachers make in the educational process and the convenience of investigating them is justified because it is clear that the consequences of past actions affect the current school educational environment and enable a peek into future possible outcomes.

The theme of the teachers' history is not attached only to the personal history but to the relationship between the individual, institutional and social histories, that can become historical synthesis [2]. Porlán studies [3] and Pozo [4] show that teacher education programs, which seek changes in pedagogical models and conceptions of teachers, fail to move their everyday practices of implicit theories that support them.

Pozo [4] proposes that to change school practices, learning and teaching, also requires changing attitudes or concepts from which educators, especially teachers and students, interpret and give meaning to these learning and teaching activities. In order to change these representations, they must first be known to them [educators] and identify their relations with the practice itself.

Teachers and students have beliefs or deeply assumed theories, perhaps never discussed, about what is learning and teaching. Such beliefs govern their actions, to the point of constituting a true hidden curriculum, in the sense given by Maceira [5], which guides, sometimes unknowingly, educational practice.

Teachers teach, largely reproducing the model that they lived when they were students. In this sense, they are unconsciously abstracted by cultural ways of understanding learning and teaching and that is manifested in their expressions and actions; to identify where they are in their implicit theories opens the possibility of re-directing their steps to find the consistency and tools to resolve the challenges they face today.

According to Goodson [6], it is necessary to do empirical studies of the teacher that allow putting him in the center of the educational processes. The teacher isn’t seen any more as a number in the statistics and becomes a person with individual characteristics. Autobiographies allow the teacher to
see himself, particularly in aspects related to teaching, from there, to make awareness. The teacher can look past fears, securities, joy, sadness, uncertainty, vulnerability, satisfactions and dissatisfactions of another era of life and bring them to the present, to sensitize him to recontact with a possibility of a teaching method that includes these aspects.

The teacher is a historical being. From what family he comes is so important that it is manifested, it is made explicit in the work of the autobiographies. “Beyond the teacher is the person who feels, perceives and feels the world with the glasses that his cultural history assigned him” [7]. Knowing that what one lives in the classroom is also lived by the other opens to the possibility of discovering the similarities in the apparent differences.

For a teacher located in the constructive theory, learning refers to mental processes of reconstructive of the own representations about the physical, cultural and even mental world and self-regulation of the activity of learning. Under this theory, learning outcomes inevitably involve a re-description of the content and of the learner. Therefore, to appreciate these results it is essential to consider changes in apprentice representational processes, including both how to give meaning to learning object as goals of proposed learning.

In this context, knowing and recognizing the life stories constitutes a tool to deepen the understanding of the world of teaching, especially considering, as proposed by Lopez de Maturana [1], that the history of life is a methodological tool that allows to collect the testimony of the life experience of teachers to show, on one hand, the events that have marked a milestone in his personal and professional life, and on the other, valuations they make about their own existence.

In the educational research project developed at the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN) from which this work emerged, some aspects of the life stories of teachers are explored, such as: their motivations to be in teaching, his thoughts about his possible foray into teaching, their perceptions of their teachers and how they started in teaching (formally or informally).

2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology followed is qualitative. The participant teachers were asked to write their autobiography and also to do a reflection on the state of their classroom, how it is now and how they would like it to be in the future.

Such instruction was given instead of asking them directly to tell their educational proposals, because the concept of "classroom" is considering the space where the educational proposals interact with their proponents and with their performers, in order to identify in the writings some aspects who otherwise teachers would not express. For example, mental will to seek new learning opportunities, emotional openness to guide educational activities, autonomy and self-requirement so that they could impact on areas outside the school.

Based on this each teacher, according to his life-story that includes professional history, recovers part of what his teaching and the classroom life was, how it is, and projects how it will be, or how he/she would like it to be, based on what has been incorporated into his reflection process.

This work was done with a group of 19 teachers who shared a teacher training space. It is reported the specific cases of 3 of them, which included:

a) The analysis of autobiographies of teachers who were given the indication to elaborate them from a defined criteria (by events, by age, relevance of personal situations, etc.), freely chosen by each one.

b) Analysis of written work where the teachers were asked about how their classroom used to be, how it is and how they would like it to be in the future.

3 RESULTS

For the analysis of the information it was incorporated a brief data sheet giving the context of the Professor at the institutional level. From the collected information were chosen paragraphs that represent aspects of the relationship between the teachers’ history and their conceptions of the classroom.

Professor G13MRRRC.
Serves an average of 40 students per semester, her training is in Computer Engineering and has been 25 years in IPN. She had completed a diploma in Virtual Learning Environments and a Diploma in Training and Updating Teaching. The major problems she reported in her classroom were the inattentiveness of the students, the lack of reading comprehension and the lack of ability to relate previous knowledge. She states that she wants to improve the communication process carried out with students and to know how to guide them.

In her writings she states the following:

[...] (At birth) I was very well received because there were no girls at home and many different things happened, my mom told me she was expecting another boy because they had already had four [...] and it was different because I was born upside down when they were born face up, I also was bringing the umbilical cord entangled on the neck and when she saw me, she knew I was different from my brothers [...] and she was most asked by people why I didn’t resemble them, years later they seemed to identify that I looked like my father’s mother [...]"

[...] I liked to watch all, I was obedient because I did not like being scold and so I observed what things provoked my brothers being scold so as not to do it [...] I think the judgments that my father gave off about my brothers marked me more than them, generating a break in me.

[...] My dad was very demanding and would like that we moved and wanted us to think like adults, we behaved as adults and we had no desire other children have like wanting everything they see, playing and running.

[...] First or second year of elementary school I got a stamp with a parrot on my notebook and it made me feel so bad, so far I try not to talk with my colleagues when I'm in school, I know I must be attentive and rarely forget to turn down the volume of my cellphone. That judgment has been recorded me so unlike all the bees stamps I also got.

In primary school I always got excellent grades. I still remember the name of each of my teachers [...] something I did not like from him (teacher) was that at the end of the (fifth grade) year he told us that the best average would be the escort and would be the flagman [...] however it was not true because I was the best average and a companion took that place and when I asked the teacher why he told me he had been in the rush and had not had time to check it earlier [...]

I have very present in mind my sixth grade teacher [...] not skipping classes even when he was sick, he taught us many things, but what I remember most are the values that he made me reaffirm.

At this stage (secondary school) [...] once my teacher of natural sciences flunked me [...] my notes were wrong and when he gave them to us, I would mention it and showed him my exam and good score. His response was that it was not a great deal, in the next review I would recover the notes, and that for me was a break [...] finally they said that all he could do was to except me from the next review because they could not modify the kardex. Emotionally I was disappointed but I could not do more.

[...] (At high level) I chose to do a general knowledge test to obtain my degree, and submit three times so I could pass. The first time was a very hard blow because I had spent much time studying.

[...] Given this situation of passivity and limitations, I decided to start teaching, and had been looking for a school but the opportunity had not presented until 2008 [...]

[...] (As a teacher) I want a classroom in which my position as leader shows flexibility and openness that my attitudes tend to be free from bias and avoid generalizations, to give me the opportunity to interact with students and we build learning together. In this way we will travel next to each other, recognizing that teacher do not possess the absolute truth and that the student has much to say, and that even the most naive saying can have some wisdom and enrichment.

As a leader in the classroom I assume the commitment of my ongoing training and development of skills both in my discipline as in pedagogy area, teaching, communication and human relations. Cultivate as a human to be prepared to meet the diversity of students and prevent acts of discrimination or any abuse being.
I would have developed the ability to open all the doors of perception consciously, be alert to each of the expressions of students whether verbal or physical way [...] and thus create a more inclusive environment in which I can integrate and make feel integrated each student.

My classroom is currently the case with the points I have mentioned, but I think I need to work on them to have a greater mastery and conscious change or react to unforeseen events arising in the class manner.

My position as a leader in the classroom has been to facilitate student learning but I recognize that I give priority to implementing the program and I have to make cuts even if there are students who may continue with some doubts. I try to create an atmosphere of trust in which they can express themselves freely but still have to do direct questions because they are students who are used to the teacher to be the one who exposes and they receive the information, I would like to contribute to gradually modify this scheme and work habits that currently prevail.

As a leader I want to acknowledge my emotions to identify the emotions of students and their different perception channels to achieve learning.

 [...] I would like to have the ability to correct students without annulling them or denying them, to recognize them as the other legitimate within the social relationship, for this I have to develop the ability to say things with tact, and although I think I already do, I still have a long way to go [...] because in the interacting with humans there are always unforeseen circumstances.

The story shows how the teacher was placed over her student life to the demands and characteristics of her teachers, and explained what the behaviour of their teachers involved emotionally at that stage. However, if it is considered that she has been teaching for at least 10 years, it is shown that the story was not enough to enter a different teaching and reporting have moved very similar to those of their teachers schemes, example of this is in her concerns expressed on her file. Nevertheless this is surpassed in her educational proposals; here the teacher opens the mind and flies. There can be seen confrontations and a difficulty in finding a way to be a teacher different from what she was exposed over her student life. In her autobiography, hard and difficult aspects are observed. It is noted that at one stage of her life the teacher reveals her rigidity, by remaining silent in situations where others have gone over her rights, or when she only sees the traditional; and another part of the teacher expresses the possibility of a leap to a new perspective of teaching.

Professor G13ACCP.

Serves an average of 90 students per semester, his training is in Communications and Electronics Engineering and has been 17 years in the IPN. He has taken the Diploma in Teacher Training and Update. The major problems reported in his classroom were keeping the interest of students in the field, designing effective evaluation mechanisms and establishing dynamic for better understanding of the issues. He would like to establish mechanisms for better learning and knowledge for himself and his students.

In his autobiography, the teacher speaks almost exclusively of family relationships and some problems that have deeply affected him, and at the end, on this states:

It has cost me a lot of work but I needed to have this out, to tell it to someone outside the family [...]

About his beginnings and motivations in teaching:

The year was 1995 when about to finish my career on Engineering in Communications and Electronics [...], a colleague invited me to join a project that was to train people who were interested in obtaining basic knowledge of electronics to find a job [...] it was unfortunately almost overnight [...] I met the director [...] I started by discussing my concerns. One of them was to know which characteristics had the group of students who I would attend, as could be the schooling they had and if they already had some prior knowledge of electronics and with this I could draw a line on how to start and how to prepare my classes. The director told me that the municipality was the creator of the program and it was in the process of being approved, but he must start on the same day and actually there was not a curriculum to cover and what I considered would be fine.

Faced with such surprise I bite the bullet and had to just get without having prepared a class. So quickly I did a reminder of those teachers who I had throughout my career and it seemed to me,
at that time, they met the characteristics of good teaching [...] my first teaching experience was successful because it allowed me to see other realities to which I was not used.

Often the teacher does not understand that each student is different and that we cannot treat them all equally [...] this first teaching experience lasted only three days since they did not authorize the training program.

Then a colleague told me that there were requesting teachers who could give related subjects in the area of electronics [...] the first time I introduce myself to teach I felt very sure of my knowledge, but somehow I did not feel the same confidence on how to transmit it.

The way I've changed the way I taught at first is by learning that the student is the most important in this dynamic part of teaching. A significant learning that I found is represented by the phrase "the word is powerful and moves emotions." I'd never put myself to reflect on the emotions, as I had always thought in the classroom as a place to teach and learn. Through all this time I learned many things that previously had not considered and now I see them as an important part of teaching.

This story shows the inner world of teaching, the part that tends to ignore or downplay, the teacher opens his family pain and finds a place to share and express his relief. From his initial concerns is clear his involvement in the classroom, where the student is not the only perceived, but him is too. His history speaks of values and disappointments and, above all, of going forward with an open mind to discover, to incorporate what makes sense in the search for a better teaching in which the human, the emotional, is a present posture.

Professor G13MGTG.

She serves an average of 200 students per semester; her training is in Mechatronics Engineering and has 7 years working at IPN. She has completed the Diploma in Education and Teaching Update and some preparatory courses in teaching mathematics. For her, the problems in the classroom are dropping out of students, lack of interest and motivation. She would like to improve interaction and integration teacher-student and student-teacher, and improve their methodologies or procedures in teaching mathematics.

In her autobiography she expresses:

In the first year of high school began my interest to study, and this was due to teachers who motivated me to go ahead despite the circumstances. And in this autobiography I want to mention my gratitude to my teachers of seventh grade [...] The last grade of secondary I was preparing me for my exam to enter the high school level, I was very motivated but the circumstances made me wonder whether to continue or not, but my mom talked to me and told me the following "go ahead and we’ll see how we’ll make and try to throw raring to get a scholarship and so you can cover your studies." And so it was that went on.

Later my interest to have a career in engineering and motivation of my classmates and teachers made me do the entrance exam.

The beginning of my teaching, began in 2008 with an introductory workshop which meant Distance Higher Secondary Education especially for students who want conclude their studies, it was a project to support soldiers who could not study schooled. After the introductory workshop for all teachers we regrouped as teams to be sent to our respective Centers, my team was sent to the Training Center of Military Industry, after the (welcome) event, we organized to present each our educational planning and schedules to start the school year. This is how I started my experience as a teacher teaching math classes beginning with the Fundamentals of Algebra course.

On my first day starting as a math teacher, I was excited, full of joy and motivated, had prepared my class with lots of emotion, but also very nervous of being wrong, it was a meeting of many emotions.

Later I joined the National Polytechnic Institute as Professor Technician of laboratories of Electronics [...] over there they gave me the opportunity to teach the subject of Electronic Measurements, it was a very pleasant experience because it is another type of students compared to my former students, another environment, young people learn in different ways and / or shapes, as it was again my thrill of nerves and fear of being wrong.

About her classroom she states:
[...]
it is different in the way that my teaching matures, as long as my natural essence of teaching never fades.

What I have learned is that despite the obstacles one has to keep going past them to get where we want to get and achieve what we proposed to ourselves. I want to be a teacher to whom my students talk to and leave with a good impression, I want to help improve the education system in the area of mathematics spreading tools, dynamic strategies, dynamic skills [...] to give direction to the inclusion of knowledge comprehensively to students and thus make good citizens and people with a healthy critical thinking.

The history of the teacher exemplifies a story of challenges to continue studying and the importance of listening to a mentor: Her Mother. It speaks to the value of the effort, and of the commitment to her teaching. Her experience is still short compared to other teachers and at different times she expressed her need for help and to improve her teaching to address issues such as desertion, something that her history was able to avoid, as well as interest and motivation. These elements require, among other things, knowledge that in a career in Mechatronics Engineering are hardly taught, but that her history itself teaches her and that’s where she can quench her thirst to address the challenges posed.

4 CONCLUSIONS

One of the reasons that make fundamental the study of the teachers’ life stories is that if a teacher is given the chance to look at himself and his proposals in the classroom, he can consciously be repositioned in other ways and with different educational proposals.

To change teaching some aspects are taken into account, like emotional, relational and in greater extent the participating as possibilities to observe and promote students skills more oriented to an interpretive theory, i.e., connecting the results, the processes and learning conditions are relatively linear. Perhaps this opens the possibility of moving and change their practice toward a constructivist theory if, among other things, institutional trust conditions that give rise to such a transition are generated.

It is generally observed that teachers are able to incorporate new insights for teaching, including aspects of student learning, school dropouts, motivation, communication, evaluation and the emotional as strongly intervening in the process. The relationship of the latter with their own life stories, where the impact of interpersonal relationships constitutes a fundamental part of their way of perceiving the world, can be seen.

The results show the need to foster the process of knowing who are the teachers of the institution, what their histories are and how they are benchmarks for planning institutional changes, as it is their consideration and inclusion which will generate policies and programs that meet their needs and open up real possibilities for change.

REFERENCES


