SEARCHING FOR MEANING IN GRAMMAR SCHOOLING DEEP STRUCTURE

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Abstract

The post-modern paradox seems to revolve today around the dichotomy between a “borderless” or a “fenced” world. Yet, it is undeniable that 65 countries have already erected barriers along their international borders in a self-contradictory attempt to...foster conviviality?

Extending the metaphor of fences to educational contexts, we find that schools seem to be no exception. Despite experiences that are now challenging conventional boundaries in terms of time and space or teaching methodologies, the fact is that over the years, the basic grammar of schooling has been decoded through images of walled spaces, compartmentalised knowledge, classified students, overly-rigid Professional Learning Communities (PCL), scripted curricula, and expected outcomes. Furthermore, this futile attempt, says Schriewer, at homogenising “what is deeply diversified” (1, pp. 7-26) still coexists in Argentina with initiatives that intend to bring about “fresh air” to schools. Although substantial work in the field of pedagogical innovation has scrutinized the impact of collaborative learning, project-based education, thinking-based learning, gamification, design thinking, to mention but a few, when discussing the grammar of schooling, we seem to have overlooked the fact that social ambience intersects all the paths of that innovation surge.

The present study aims to explore learners’ sensitivity to the character and atmosphere of school culture of a primary school in Santa Fe, Argentina, which has been chosen on the grounds that it has recently launched a process of innovation. The study intends to track down this process in order to unveil how grammar of schooling innovations may have an impact on the perceptions of students’ schooling experiences, so much so they may either hamper or enhance their possibilities of making sense of learning situations. Research adopts an interdisciplinary approach, using the complexity standpoint, allowing the articulation of variables as they intersect to create certain grammar of schooling frameworks. Inkeeping with this quest, the analysis of field data gathered in interviews with the actors and observations of the territory recorded on video and photographs, reveals aspects of both the surface and deep structures of the grammar of schooling. Findings concerning the management of school time and space, continuities and discontinuities, choice of contents and methods, as well as the nature of interactions that weave a specific social fabric behind and outside school walls, may shed light on the existence of hidden mechanisms in its culture (2). In this light, research findings should eventually contribute to model interventions to strengthen schools, not only to fulfill their primary mission of fostering socially meaningful learning, but to upgrade student experience in social learning spaces. Finally, empowering schools to tear down fences might eventually pave the way for the ultimate goal: creating a culture of openness and co-development.

Keywords: Pedagogical innovation, grammar of schooling, ambience, complexity, social learning spaces.

1 INTRODUCTION

To claim that the world has greatly changed these years is simply a trite expression, however, and contradictorily enough, schools have displayed a remarkable resilience to maintain an apparently unquestioned status quo. In today’s world, the constant flow of information, languages or people contribute to the construction of a global framework of interaction. There is an urge, then, to analyse school reality in a wider historical context of globalization and liquid modernity (3). In fact, both researchers and teachers around the world express similar concerns with regards to the organizational and cultural milieu of schools, on the grounds that innovation processes seem to be struggling against a monolithic resistance to change the traditional grammar of schooling. Moreover, it is widely acknowledged that nowadays schools are trudging back and forth against the restless pace of the information and knowledge society.

Captured as they are by their daily routines, educators carry on with their activities apparently unaware of the eventual effect of their work or the conditions that schools are to generate in order to...
fulfill their essential mission, which, according to Hassoun, is to transmit culture (4). The present case study, then, aims at scrutinizing a process of innovation launched by a school in the city of Gálvez, Santa Fe, Argentina with the purpose of determining how non-traditional approaches to grammar of schooling may exert an influence on the perceptions of students concerning their experiences at school. In this particular case, the school attempts to challenge conventional practices in terms of time and space, patterns of student interaction, teaching methodologies and curriculum design so as to create better conditions for learning. In this light, the study intends to read between the lines, to comprehend grammar of schooling in order to unveil the degree to which novel practices may either constrain or increase the likelihood of students making sense of learning situations.

The field of educational research embraces school life as a kaleidoscopic scenery for human experience. In fact, so disturbing and complex is the reality of schools that it has become the focus of interest for researchers and practitioners from a number of disciplines. Thus, it is through their interdisciplinary conversations, and from the complexity standpoint, that it may be possible to gain deeper insight into the essence of school life. In fact, the concept of grammar of schooling itself connotes interdisciplinarity and, following and Tyack &Cuban, is used to refer to the structural norms that shape “standardized organizational practices in dividing time and space, classifying students and allocating them to classrooms, and splintering knowledge into subjects” (2, p.85). From our standpoint, the educational researcher’s task implies the drive to submerge oneself in the tangled reality of schools; in an attempt to fully comprehend their essence. It is at this point, then, that it seems natural to resort to the metaphor of deep structure borrowed from Chomsky (5), to analyse school culture. In fact, the metaphor of grammar of schooling as a construct, consisting of surface and deep structure becomes appropriate for the problematization of the sociocultural complexity schools.

Dewey (1902, as cited in Tyack & Cuban 2, p.84) said that “learning is basically a socially-situated activity” and, as such, it cannot be denied that “the machinery of instruction”, plays a crucial role in the process. According to Jerome Freiberg (6), measuring climate is an instrument that must be valued as conducive to educational reform. In this vein, one of the main assumptions of the present study is that research about grammar of schooling should consider social ambience as a determining factor intersecting all the paths of any process of educational innovation. Taking the pulse of school climate, then, is one of the measures of the success of an educational organization. It may be described in terms of a number of internal features that make an organization distinct from another and produces an impact on the behaviour of its members. In the words of Hoy and Miskel (1996, as cited in Tyack & Cuban 2, p.99), school climate is “a relatively enduring quality of the entire school that is experienced by members, describes their collective perceptions of routine behaviour, and affects their attitudes and behaviour in the school”. And it can be added that this unique quality of a school fosters a sense of attachment that, by helping each subject feel personal worth, strengthens social bonds and cultural cohesion. School climate, in effect, may be realised from multiple perspectives, concerning not only organizational, environmental or social dimensions, but also emotional aspects. In this respect, Freiberg (6, p.22), also notes that “checking the learning rhythm of a school and the conditions that support it, enable schools to be a protective and resilient factor in the lives of children and youth rather than another barrier”.

In order to depict organisational dimensions of schools, Rockwell has developed specific categories which she calls “temporal continuities y discontinuities”. These temporalities, in turn, may be depicted as three intersecting planes – the longue durée, relative continuity, and everyday co-construction. The former are related with systems of caring that have persisted as the hard core of school culture. The temporalities of relative continuity are those categories that evolve for some time, develop or finally step back. Finally, those temporalities that are the result of daily co-construction are the ones that allow subjects to transform the sense of historical legacies as well as to create new uses for cultural tools (7, pp. 11-25).

The grammar of schooling is also framed by other temporalities that delineate the pace of learning processes. Escolano (8, pp. 131-146), describes certain “school chronologies” that determine specific homogeneous rhythms in teaching and learning processes. These unified chronologies are reflected in organisational patterns such as educational levels, selection of contents on the basis of life stages and the requirements of presentiality and simultaneous teaching, which are still core practices in schools.

It is widely acknowledged that aspects concerning the ecology of schools such as lightning, air quality or ambient noise can have direct influences on the health and attitudes of individuals who inhabit them. Measures including an analysis of physical and material aspects of the territory as the condition of the premises, hallways, and classrooms or even the range of colours used, the type of work
displayed on walls, or furnishings may provide relevant data ranging from student participation to levels of stress created by extraneous sources inside schools.

In addition, the composition of the population of the school creates a milieu that is unique, as it is the result of multiple socioeducational variables and the relationships established among institutional actors. In fact, the system of interaction that evolves behind and outside school walls generates a social fabric that permeates learning situations. The culture category has been defined by Anderson (9, pp.368–420) as the expectations people may have about educational outcomes. In fact, a school that promotes affective student outcomes focuses on the transmission of shared beliefs and a values-system based on solidarity, tolerance, cooperation, courtesy, acceptance of one’s and others’ feelings and friendliness, to mention but a few. On their part, teachers stimulate learning fostering a positive classroom atmosphere and show interest and confidence regarding student outcomes. In fact, they also exhibit feelings of self-efficacy and professional attitudes. At an institutional level, the school displays mutual responsibility showing that not only students are assessed, but also their own functioning. It should be noted that parents’ opinions are also to be requested and incorporated into these institutional evaluations. Frugoni (10) emphasizes the idea that the possibilities for learning to occur do not lie on the subjects or their personal characteristics, but on the quality of the situations in which those subjects are involved, or on the nature the system of interactions should have in order to constitute scaffolding. Consequently, it could be inferred that school climate must be analysed in terms of the shared perceptions and beliefs about school community from multiple perspectives: teachers, students and parents.

Another assumption the present study will try to verify is whether there is a co-relation between the implementation of new teaching methodologies in a more open curriculum design and students’ perceptions of an upgraded learning experience. These methods and teaching tools include personalized learning, interdisciplinary project work, collaborative learning, emotional and environmental education, flipped classroom techniques, to mention but a few. The assumption, then, implies that quality of instruction at the classroom level is connected with the previously discussed dimensions which, hinged by curricular developments, may produce shifts from the traditional perspectives. These might, eventually, transform schools into more purposeful, flexible, and student-centred places. In this respect, Wang, Haertel and Walberg (11, p. 205) conducted a meta-analysis that reported that “when averaged together, the different kinds of instruction and climate had nearly as much impact in learning as the student aptitude categories”. The study examined the most significant influences on learning only to find that, among 28 categories, the most significant ones were social behaviour and motivational affective attributes, peer group characteristics, quality of instruction, school culture and classroom climate. The exploration of school climate, then, needs to consider, in depth, the multiplicity of its roots as well as the capacity of reaction for change that schools can demonstrate.

2 METHODOLOGY

As mentioned earlier, it is through the dialogue of different voices that we can come to a deeper understanding of the complexities of school life. The approach, then, needs to be interdisciplinary (integrating both the historicity and cultural diversity of school environments) and from the complexity standpoint, requiring the analysis of field data gathered from various sources. Observations of the territory consisted of videos and photographs which were also used to reveal aspects of both the surface and deep structures of the grammar of schooling. Other indirect measures included an analysis of the physical conditions of the premises. For example, the range of colours, levels of lighting and noise, temperature, the existence of green areas, safety conditions, the type of work displayed in the classrooms or furnishings, among others, so as to observe aspects regarding participation, comfort, or stress levels placed on the teachers and students, as they pinpoint the dynamics of caring within the school building (6, p.34). Other data collection measures consisted of requiring young children to draw their school as they see it so as to be able to interpret how they feel about their environment. Their responses were usually open-ended but provided a lot of data for interpretation. Other sources of information consisted of journal narratives kept by teachers, formal school records, surveys and interviews with the actors based on collective perceptions of school members as well as shared perceptions of behaviour. The data gathered reveals aspects of the organizational, environmental and social dimensions of school climate and more importantly, with regards to the nature of interactions that weave a specific social fabric behind and outside school walls. Essentially, a combination of direct and indirect measures was used on the grounds that they should provide a balanced profile of the school under scrutiny.
3 RESULTS
One of the aims of the present study has been to unveil the role of school climate in a process of educational innovation. Thus, in order to outline grammar of schooling changes through the process, and from direct observations, photographs and videos, written records, surveys and interviews with the actors in the territory, it was possible to gather information about the context of the innovation.

3.1 Context of the innovation
3.1.1 The School and its Ecology
The school selected for the present study is situated in the centre of Gálvez, a small city of 24,000 inhabitants in the south-east of Santa Fe at a distance of 80 km. from the capital of the province in Argentina. Research recently carried out in the field of cultural studies revealed that “residents from the city rate the educational services in their community higher than those of comparable communities in the region” (Pochettino, 2017, 12, p.8) and remarked educators’ active involvement in cultural life (12). In this broader context, then, stands the school under scrutiny. It is a small institution which has two educational levels: kindergarten and primary and it can be described as semi-bilingual, as they teach a second language, (English from the very early years of schooling). The educational service is highly personalized, with groups of students reduced in number. Demographically, the school’s population belongs to middle-class and low-middle class and it is multicultural, as there are students of different nationalities: bolivian, brasilian, north american and chinese. In this respect, it should be pointed out that these particular features require an effort on the part of the school staff, who must actively engage in a quest for novel ways to face the challenge of including all subjects in the system and cater for their multiple educational needs. This aspect should not be disregarded, on the grounds that the existence of highly-motivated staff is an asset for the efficacy of any process of innovation.

The ecology of the school is another factor that converges to generate changes in grammar of schooling. The quality of the infrastructure is adequate, with new areas and others that require restructuring (they are the oldest ones: restrooms and some classrooms). However, the general state of the premises is good and it can be observed that the staff and school authorities are interested in creating comfortable spaces for students and teachers as well. The school has spacious green areas: a large backyard with trees, plants and grass, a space that is kept in its natural state, considering students need to be in contact with nature to develop environmental awareness. Moreover, there is an area used for an orchard that has been conveniently separated from the rest of the backyard and is prepared every school year for sowing and harvest. Yet, as in most schools, the ambient noise levels are frequently high, producing stress in students and teachers, especially when they are in the school yard and playground. This space, then, has been adapted for students of different ages by placing games and “slow zones” with seats and tables in the open air or under roofed galleries. This strategy reflects the way in which the management is dealing with the ecology of the school and the dynamics of caring this institution has displayed in order to foster the kind of positive relationships which are basic to healthy growth. Spaces have been clearly signalled and there is a contingency plan for emergency cases which denotes a school policy based on the need to focus on problem prevention rather than problem solving. There is not a gymnasium or a large covered space for physical training, but these activities are carried out in a nearby club. There is a small room for meetings with parents, students, teachers or specialists, which implies that school life extends outside its walls, involves families in the learning process and outreaches the community.

Classrooms are well-lit, airy, of an adequate size and painted in white every year. Some of them have a small library from which students may borrow material to read at home or in their free time at school. Every year, a group of students and a teacher organize their movable classroom library and celebrates its opening in the school patio. Evidently, the intention is to foster reading habits by building bridges with the rest of the community and the outside. In general, the spaces are used with flexibility, changing the position of benches, using free spaces on the floor, transforming classrooms into workshops or genuine resource centres for autonomous study by resorting to bigger tables that were customized by students themselves. This reflects the level of functionality that has been assigned to these arrangements to suit the tasks and patterns of interactions proposed by teachers, as well as the intention to make the best use of facilities. Classrooms are properly furnished with decorative implements that make spaces homey. Furniture is clean and not scribbled by students (a typical practice in Argentinian schools), on the contrary, it looks intact even though it is evident it is not new. Some classrooms have even been re-styled as more social places revealing how the blend of architectural and pedagogical forms should follow new functions. This seems to indicate a collective
interest in taking care of school premises and keeping them cosy and welcoming for anyone who might need to use them. It is noticeable that even younger students express positive feelings about their schooling environment, as reflected in their drawings which represent spaces of the school they particularly enjoy. Classrooms have a comfortable temperature and look tidy. In fact, there is enough room to organise materials in cupboards with boxes and tins to classify school elements. Students leave some of their books or materials there and they look orderly. Other materials are kept at the teacher’s desk (markers, pins, tape, ink, etc.) and students show respect and interest in keeping these elements in this safe place. This reflects the existence of routine organizational practices that are important to the institution and its members. It can be observed that there is plenty of students’ work displayed on walls, hallways and other common areas, which suggests high levels of student engagement and participation. The school is equipped with teaching materials, notebooks, didactic games, and furniture for a time off during recess. It should be noted that this accounts for an unusual awareness the school has shown concerning the importance of free time in order to maximize learning. Obviously, there has been a preoccupation to create spaces and times for students to relax and have a break from school routine.

As part of the innovation process, the school management has decided to use solar energy in the school premises. This project intends to position the school as the scenery for healthier life experiences for students by developing an Environmental Education Program as a transversal content in the curriculum. The concept underlying this innovation is that by experiencing sustainability and contact with nature, students will develop environmental awareness and knowledge of global issues, and their possible solutions that they will pass on to their families and, eventually, to the rest of society. Likewise, commitment with this philosophy of life should promote positive social values, greater sensitivity and an interest to prevent ecological problems and to protect life on the planet.

3.1.2 Organisational Dimension

From the organizational standpoint, the school adopts many of the traditional patterns of other educational centres. The interview with the school Principal provided relevant information about the nature of longue durée temporalities (7), “…we see how they can create certain routines for children to feel safe. For example, knowing that the school day is organised in a certain way that makes students, particularly Chinese children, feel at ease in class. The same happens with little children…when they know what happens next, they get a feeling of safety that helps them to adapt to kindergarten”. It seems obvious, then, that this framework acts as support for the most vulnerable subjects. With regards to temporalities of relative-continuity (7) the Principal mentions the changes brought about by the inclusion of technology in the daily lives of schools, which could be considered contingent due to the speed with which the machinery tools of the information society emerge and change. Finally, she makes reference to Temporalities of daily co-construction (7) which generate “reciprocity in schooling”, novel patterns of interaction and co-construction that cross the limits of school walls. Though, in fact, there are unified chronologies in the organisational structure of this school (such as educational levels determined by the Ministry of Education), the innovation process has launched a number of proposals oriented to cause a move from traditional, self-contained to open classrooms as well as to break “school chronologies” that determine specific homogeneous rhythms in teaching and learning processes. The interviewee expressed that “considering that some structuring conditions of schools fragment instructional time, school management decided to solve this issue by implementing longer but flexible periods for learning, but also longer recess time”. Class observations reflected how the strategy works: students have enough time to reach the synthesis of new contents, after having been able to practise them more profoundly in these longer periods. In addition, teachers are able to assist students in a more personalised ways, as this new continuity allows for more opportunities to respond to a multiplicity of situations, taking actions to redress asymmetries. Likewise, reducing recess to only two in the morning signifies time off at school and contributes to a suitable timing required to achieve better learning outcomes. After examining three intersecting planes, namely, the longue durée, relative continuity, and everyday co-construction (7), it can be concluded that all three dimensions are needed to re-examine the question of the outcomes of schooling for child development, given the profound complexity of school experience. Clearly, the decisions made concerning space and time management at this school show an interest for encouraging multiple patterns of interaction and maximizing participation in order to promote learning in a more democratic social coexistence and to prevent intramural exclusions.
3.1.3 Social dimension and cultural milieu

After a quick overview of the classes, it was evident that the atmosphere was pleasant, the classrooms orderly, with students participating actively and engaging in the tasks proposed by teachers. It could also be noticed that the communicational strategies of teachers were effective: calm tone of voice, clear, precise instructions for activities oriented towards problem-solving with different levels of cognitive challenge. Students were eager to take part and worked collaboratively in pairs and with the permanent assistance of the teacher. From the observation of the school playground it could be stated that students play an active role in the maintenance of the school and take pride in looking after the younger students. It could be also observed that at break time many students chose “slow areas” to read books from the portable library. Opinions polls conducted among the staff provide data about how school culture delineates students’ profiles in a consistent way. When teachers were asked about peer group characteristics, the most frequent response indicated that the academic level was very good and that, in general, it was easy to work with students because they were stimulated and curious.

The staff is fully aware of the school aims, namely, fostering critical thinking, autonomy, responsibility, student-generated initiatives, disposition to learn and high motivation. Moreover, the observer was able to spot attitudes and gestures in teachers-students interactions that were consistent with these aims. Teacher expectations about student outcomes are reported to be positive and most of the staff participates actively in projects and extra-curricular activities. When asked about the strengths of the school, they affirmed that the main one was the close relationships established with colleagues and students. The surveys conducted also reflected that rules and agreements concerning behaviour among teachers and towards students, between the school and the parents, between the school and external agencies are expressed clearly by the school management and that, in general, staff abides these norms. Teachers are encouraged to work collaboratively, in pairs or in teams, moreover, some of the workshops organised have been designed based on the premise that the presence of two teachers was required for interdisciplinarity to actually occur. Although collaborative progressive teaching is highly labour-intensive, teachers displayed highly professional attitudes as well as openness to participate in these innovations. Surveys also reflected that teachers’ feelings of self-efficacy increased after the programs started. It appears that most members of the school team have achieved consistency and created cohesion in the team. There is an evident esprit de corps in the staff, who have collective perceptions of routine behaviour which shape their attitudes and “ways of inhabiting the school”. All in all, it may be inferred that the school is oriented towards keeping a democratic ethos alive in its community, reinforced by the drive to keep up high participation levels. For instance, school policies in connection with the relationship established between parents and school is based on a system of “open doors” and the school management is attentive and service-oriented, promptly responding to the needs of the families. However, some teachers sustain that dealing with parents has increasingly become more complex. The most frequent communicative strategy is face-to-face conversation, and these dialogues are recorded in school documents which are confidential. It should also be pointed out that parents’ opinions are requested and incorporated into institutional evaluations and their main concerns are weighed at the time of producing institutional reforms.

Finally, it must be noted out that the conditions of this school differ sharply from those of most schools in Argentina. Indicators such as overpopulation, overage, repetitions or drop-outs are very low (as suggested by school official documents), whereas in the rest of the country this is not precisely the norm. Moreover, this is a young school, created in 1992, which probably makes it more malleable, flexible and susceptible to change.

3.2 Quality of instruction

The other assumption the present study set out to corroborate is whether quality of instruction at the classroom level and climate are considered indicators of an upgraded learning experience in students’ perceptions. This innovation programme conceived new teaching methodologies in the framework of a more open curriculum. These teaching tools were presented at teachers’ meetings, (actual workshops, indeed) where they discussed the innovations and got prepared to make informed decisions as to which instruments they might use. Teachers agreed that collaborative learning and the personalized learning approach that the school had traditionally encouraged was one of its strengths, but also considered trying novel practices. All of them engaged in interdisciplinary project work with multi-age range groups. Kindergarten developed a project consisting of three workshops: “Orchard and Recycling”, “Cooking and Crafts” and “Emotional Education and Corporal Expression”. The
“orchard and recycling” activities are intended to develop ecological awareness and attachment to nature, “cooking and crafts” is designed to articulate with the previous one by teaching students to transform the crops into real meals, and the “emotional education” workshop is oriented to the identification, expression and control of emotions by means of yoga and mindfulness techniques. These activities are programmed every fortnight and simultaneously during the whole working day. Students decide on the workshop they want to attend and join together with students of different age groups. In primary school, teachers devised a project based on experiential learning in the field of Natural Science (carried out by 1st, 2nd and 3rd years of primary school), and an interdisciplinary project on storytelling (4th and 7th years) linking music, art and ITC; and flipped classroom techniques to teach Natural Science (5th and 6th years).

In addition, the school management has devised new educational proposals for primary school presented as extra-curricular. The “Emotional and Health Care Education” workshop has proved to be meaningful for students as they stated their need for “a space to be heard and to express emotions”. “Environmental Education” is delivered in the framework of the technology workshop. Surveys showed that this generation seems to be not only concerned but also committed to improving environmental conditions. They value the work the school carries out in this sense and consider that their families also engage in environmentally-friendly actions. Students appear to be highly motivated to engage in projects connected with recycling and restoring forgotten cultural legacies, such as old machinery that used to be placed as a billboard in a fountain at the entrance of the city. They recall campaigns organised by ecological non-governmental organisations and refer to these experiences as highly educative for them. Other two interdisciplinary experiments link art with study skills in one case and art with ICT in the other. Students expressed they liked them because they could work together with other group of students and that it was fun to be able to discuss ideas from different perspectives. Some of them said they were surprised at the initiative and only a few of them claimed it made no difference compared with more traditional methodologies. What seems to indicate that students became motivated by this project is the fact that they started to weave new links with other disciplines such as music, architecture or cultural studies, suggesting creative ways to deal with contents.

These innovations imply blending specialized subjects with core curricular subjects, favouring an interdisciplinary approach and subverting the logic of the requirements of presentality and simultaneous teaching which are still frequent practices in schools. For teachers, the innovations implied the opportunity to work together and to make informed choices concerning curriculum design and methodologies. Moreover, the chance to use time, place and number of students as flexible resources and to diversify uniform class periods and standard-size classes proved to be appreciated by students as well.

It was possible, then, to verify our assumption that the combination of the two variables, namely novel methodologies and quality of instruction together with a positive school climate produces relevant changes in the grammar of schooling, promoting students’ multiple literacies and motivation to learn. The practices implemented are not novel, yet the machinery devised it is. The way in which these new patterns were put to work is interesting to explore, especially in view of the fact that the changes were not resisted by the staff and welcomed by students. In effect, it seems that students’ openness and enthusiasm also triggered teachers’ drive to innovate. In fact, the changes implemented were gradual and deeply grounded in the school territory and culture. Furthermore, they did not deviate from educational legislation and teachers were given the chance to choose from different alternative methodologies. All in all, the capacity of reaction for change that this school has demonstrated may, perhaps, account for the legitimacy of the innovations launched.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Undoubtedly, the hold of traditional grammar of schooling still prevails; and most schools continue to be constrained behind the walls they have built themselves. The particular case of the school under study, however, has revealed multiple initiatives consisting of departures from traditional grammar of schooling with the purpose of creating a mid-way between the graded and the ungraded school structure. Interestingly enough, innovations implied, not fundamentally altering the way the school functions, but introducing novel organisational strategies concerning school climate and new methodological approaches which were adopted gradually, allowing institutional actors not only to adapt more easily to the changes but also to intervene creatively in the process. The innovation project has proved to be more than an intramural experiment, yet it should be pointed out that substantial changes are more plausible under some of the distinct features this school has and that we have described in this work. The fact is that the feasibility of institutionalising reform efforts depends
not only on staff development but also on students’ (and families’) perceptions of the nature of their schooling experiences. In effect, these two elements enable the possibility of ensuring constancy and continuity (6, p.44) of an innovation surge. Eventually, longitudinal studies should be carried out in order to track down this and other processes of innovation and their outgrowths in the long run. All in all, the study has revealed that altering an entrenched grammar of schooling system is not a vain attempt. Meirieu (13), in a Lettre à un jeune professeur (Paris, ESF, 2005) brilliantly expresses: “A school’s programme may not be reduced to the disciplines it teaches. The major discipline of a school, seen from a cultural point of view, is the school itself. This is how the students experience it and it is this which defines the meaning it has for them.” Precisely, our search for meaning in grammar of schooling deep structure has led us along a passage-way of discovery with the certainty that schools are not places to fence people in, but the mise-en-scène where we can enact better ways to be in the world.

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