



Inclusion as a possibility



Ministerio de Educación,
Ciencia y Tecnología



Organization of the American States
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and Development (AICD)

The inclusion as a possibility

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Introduction

This document forms part of a series of materials prepared to the interior of the Hemispheric Project “*Elaboración de políticas para la prevención del fracaso escolar*”, (“*Preparation of policies for the prevention of the school failure*”, sub region MERCOSUR

Each one of these texts have the purpose of contributing with reflections, conceptualizations and keys to understand the core problems that the region is going through. The relation between poverty and education, social and education unequalness, school bond and community, learning and teaching in critical situations.

The receivers of these materials are teachers of different levels and modalities of the education system that form part of the countries of the MERCOSUR.

The conceptual developments of each document are accompanied by activities and suggestions, with the purpose of widening and deepening the proposed subjects.

In the same way, this series of documents shall be available in the web page of the Project: <http://tq.educ.ar/fracasoescolar>

It is expected that these materials are shared among colleagues, in spaces of formation, reflection and training.

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Social and educational inequality

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Thinking about the issue of social and educational inequality implies addressing the perspective on poverty and structural violence that strongly conditions children, teenagers, youth and adults who are in the educational institutions or those who are nearby. To what extent does the school act as a resistance space? Or, on the contrary, to what extent do the relegation mechanisms of students that overcome exclusion work inside it? In turn, from the point of view of the society, is the school seen as a possible place of better justice for those children and teenagers or is it an institution that lost symbolic efficiency in the socialization and biographization processes?

The research I have been making for a long time, has allowed me to understand the fact that students marked in their essential careers by different kinds of exclusion processes, tend to see themselves as the final cause of their own failures; they take themselves the credit due to the discredit they have suffered. But at the same time, in those researches, the unavoidable value of school for children and teenagers who have suffered material and symbolic conditioning of poverty is emphasized; wherever the society excludes them, in certain school institutions they learn to revalue themselves as people with rights, which gives meaning to their own social and school value (Kaplan, 1992, 1997; Filmus et.al. 2001).

What do we understand by self-value? As we go around different social institutions and in the relationships formed there, we acquire a kind of social experience, we internalize, in a kind of mirror game, the images others give us back until we form a self-image. During that path around institutions, we manufacture an image about our value; in general, this is closely related to the way we perceive the others see us. Those values and self-values are different among the various individuals and groups. Self-perceptions, ideas that we form

about ourselves, make us put ourselves a value, and, if we are excluded, we tend to undervalue ourselves. The question that arises immediately is: What are those differences based on? Going deeper, the question is: Which processes and social relationships are verified in those institutions that allow building biographic practices for the actors, even for those belonging to subordinate groups? On the contrary, in which subtle way do some institutions reinforce implicitly the inequality before the educational fact, minimizing, unconsciously, the weakest ones? How to achieve the goal of empowering those students, with their differences, but without implicit distinctions? (1)

In this process of self-value construction the fact that the different people and groups do not have the same opportunities is usually left aside.

The two dimensions that compose the social experience, subjective hope and objective possibilities, are not the same for all students, although it is also true that institutions and teachers put them in tension in concrete practices in concrete institutions, in many cases, diminishing the initial marks of inequality during the school process.

Not all the social agents have the same possibilities or material and symbolic benefit potential, or the same things to be invested in the social and educational world. From this point of view, however, institutions and teachers have autonomy and creativity margins to tip the pendulum in favor of the widening of possibilities of students in order to subvert the unfair order.

What do we mean by *marks of inequality*? In Latin America the nineties as the ending point of a long reach process, meant a dramatic increase of unemployment, poverty and inequality. Economic and social politics carried out in this period meant the creation of wide sectors of “new poor” in conditions of growing vulnerability or exclusion. It is worth mentioning that this growing exclusion process of the labor market and of goods access did not mean necessarily in all

The countries, an increment in the desertion of the primary school, since on the contrary, it was simultaneous to the inclusion to the middle or high school of new social sectors. The major part for the first time in its family history. Please remember that in middle or high school was conceived for a few, and this mark of origin has never ceased to be present.

Thus, school institutions have to undertake this premise in the frame of school massification: trying to include those people and social groups that are going through the phenomenon of the social exclusion. However, for that school needs to be examined itself, since it is undeniable that there are mechanisms, practices and attitudes of relegation of students, even in the interior of the school system.

It begins to being asked to school some questions that trascend and at the same time committ: To comply with socio-assissting features in a context of high selectivity and social fragmentation. Thus, it is frequent and understandable that many teachers indicate with a mark of anguish that “we have not prepared for this”.

No teacher is the cause of poverty and the social misery that tinge the life of numerours lives of children and young that go to the classrooms, but the truth is that it neither can, and surely does not want to, to be foreign to this student social condition.

Keys to adress this issue



Categories of: social experience, marks of inequality, exclusion processes, social and educational vulnerability are the ones that form the proposal of this first part and as you will see below, will be treated throughout the text.

We invite you to read an experience told by a teacher and to think with other colleagues about the “other” senses that can be granted in school to these categories.

Cutting down the distance by putting heart (author: Beatriz Ricobelli, third course teacher of Escuela General Básica N° 5 JUANA MANZO, Guido Spano, Buenos Aires, Argentina). This story is part of the experiences gathered in the frame of the Multilateral project “Strategies and pedagogical material for school retention”. Ministry of Education, Science and Technology –Argentina and the American States Organization- Interamerican Agency for Cooperation and Development (AICD).

“My access to school put me closer to a different reality to the ones I had lived so far, it was necessary for me to re-elaborate my position as teacher and supervisor. Students were, in different cases, the ones that helped me achieve the great internal change. In that process I learnt to leave aside the cold and distant treatment I showed at the beginning and we started knowing each other.

With a “can I talk to you?” the most moving experience I had started a morning of March 2002.

Maria was ninth year student and had a four months baby girl. During pregnancy the whole teacher department implemented with the headmaster's office and the School Orientation Team (EOE) actions so that she did not leave school. That morning Maria came to me to talk about the need she had to be absent the following day, since she wanted to take her daughter to the pediatrician because she saw her not looking well and thinner.

We talked to the headmaster and agreed that I would go with Maria to the doctor's office.

The physician diagnosed the baby with a first malnutrition level.

Maria could not solve this problem alone: she comes from a family with a lot of siblings, no father for her and her baby. To be able to support the child, she went out with her brothers to collect trash, as another passenger of the white train.

Many teachers and all the assistants became aunts and grandmothers. It was important that Maria did not leave school and that her baby could recover. With the headmaster of the school we decided that she went to school with her baby. The baby needed a special diet with strict time schedule, and Maria did not know how to do it. We talked to her mother who authorized this.

The place for the child was prepared in school and a timetable was provided to take care of her. Maria received instructions by the cooks to prepare meal and food for the night was given to her. She also received advice on hygiene and care of clothes and baby's bottles.

The classmates showed solidarity to them, which moved us all. From school we accompanied our mother student to the control visits to the pediatrician. A year went by and we achieved that Maria ended school with her child.

While educational policies try to overcome debt with poor sectors and groups, subordinate and vulnerable ones, schools also have to try it.

School has also excluded, with a kind of unconscious complicity, vulnerable people and groups not only due to the social-economic conditionings of students, but also due to cultural, race, ethnic, genre factors, in general associated to such conditionings. Influence of social factors of differentiation is always in the students environment, although not in the form of a mechanical determinism (2). The truth is that, if to those diversities typical of plural identity of students, and that many times are subject to delegitimation, we add poverty condition, the combination is very complicated. Even students of popular sectors have the highest chances of being forced by the social destiny, as long as the school does not try to be against this apparently fatal destiny.

A micro-sociological look, focused on interior spaces of school, allows seeing certain hidden mechanisms for some sectors and social groups, that in not seen exclusion scenarios, have to be re-examined and overcome in order not to close the vicious circle of

growing poverty and vulnerability. Seeing those internal mandatory mechanisms opens a lot of doors for achievement of school inclusion and encouraging those more democratic practices that are carried out day by day by certain institutions and school people.

It is about knowing in order to transform, but at the same time, knowing in order to encourage. This is the reason why we must insist in understanding deeply those elements of school practice that tend to reproduction and the most transforming ones. Let's accept that in all social spaces, in all institutions and social relationships, there are conservation components and change elements. Both forces are always present. The question is to balance those forces in favor of transformation of the mechanisms that are perpetuated, unconsciously, by institutions and their people.

So, it is important to see the articulation between exclusion, distinction and segregation processed to the interior of schools: viewing which people are subject to those processes, practices and attitudes, being aware of the consequences on the building of their subjectivity.

Finally, our question is on how to overcome certain students exclusion practices that are being implemented and that we do not see in school everyday life, with the explicit purpose of showing what we could consider the silent elimination and discrimination. This attempt to overcome those not viewed practices is very important since they are carried out in the operation of the educational system when the school fulfills a unique role for society and for its future. Processes of fragmentation and deep exclusion to which the neoliberal politics submitted people makes us wonder now

' For me it was amazing to receive Priscilla's malnutrition (that is the name of the baby) and the headmaster went with her and helped in that situation. She understood our concern and was moved by it and requested assistance for both of them to the municipal authorities. Maria is in a municipal plan and receives social assistance. And Priscilla, spoiled by the entire school, overcame the problem, and now is extremely restless, chubby, mischievous and very happy'.

SUGERENCIA DE LECTURA



Flecha, R. 1994. "New Educational inequalities". In Castells, M. and others, New critical perspectives in education. Barcelona, Paidós.

who are the subjects, that is, how they see their reality and identity, which conditionings mark them and which hopes the inhabitants of schools.

Reflection is then about structural transformations of the contemporary society in order to wonder about personal and subjective consequences they have on the students. To understand this, let's analyze the case of teenagers and young people since this was one of the groups that has been most affected by exclusion and at the same time because the Latin American educational systems have tended in the last decades to overcrowd secondary and high school education.

Would it be too daring to pose that young people betting today on education are a kind of contemporary Quijote? How many obstacles do they have to beat to be educated? Who is their Sancho who accompanies them? How many times have they wondered about the reason to follow the road, the reason not to give it up? Which Quijote motivations are found by some of them to insist on school while others leave it? Are there inexorable winners and losers, included and excluded? Which are the external and internal conditions for some of them to reach the end of the path, for others to be itinerating and for others to be left without even being able to ride?

And the main questions on the educational system are:

- How to see and participate in the itinerary of the people not falling into willing reductionisms or fatalities? (3)
- Moreover, which degree of influence can education institutions and inclusion policies exert in composing possibilities for cultural and social placement and for deployment of subjectivity processes?
- Which subject is derived as consequence of the disintegration and desubjectivity process typical of speeches and practices prevailing in the last decades and that co-exist with civilization and subjectivity processes?

Exclusion in what sense?: making history

To start posing some answers it is necessary to be situated in the nineties when the inclusion-exclusion pair imposed its emphatic presence in diagnosis made to characterize our contemporary societies. What is its impact on building social subjectivity?

On this regard we can see that the theories on social and the hegemonic social speeches have both practical sense: they are never innocuous or innocent, but cause vision and division effects of the social world. The symbolic efficiency of these inclusion-exclusion categories is precisely in the fact that we the social subjects move as fish in the water with those ways of naming and perceiving the social issues, naturalizing them. Now, which is, how and who provides the parameter of this exclusion-inclusion pair? How is this division line between ones and the others built, between the ones outside and the ones inside, and which are the boundaries? Are the inclusion and exclusion terms mutually exclusive in all cases? Excluded or included of what?

Turning visible certain senses with which the exclusion was interpreted in the neoliberal speech is a necessary condition to propose an alternative sense building. To fight for words and social meanings

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To deepen in the "exclusion" concept we offer some parts of the book by Robert Castel, *Tricks of exclusion*,

"Exclusion was imposed recently as a concept used in the lack of another one more accurate to inform all the varieties of misery of the world. The question of exclusion is turned then into the most usual social question. (...) In most cases, exclusion currently designates situations that show a degradation regarding the prior position. This is the vulnerability situation of who has a precarious job or who lives in a dwelling of which he can be evicted if he does not pay the bills. (...) The fight against exclusion is at risk of trying to repair the wounds of the social tissue. The thought of exclusion and fight against it correspond, finally, to a classic type of purpose of the social action: to delimit intervention areas that can lead to repair activities. All tradition of social help was deployed characterizing target populations as from an accurate deficit. When categorizing and isolating problem populations, we give ourselves the means to take specific and carefully addressed responsibility. In the case of

la extensión de este enfoque presenta un grave peligro: < } 100 { > new populations that suffer today a lack of integration (unemployed or youth with deficient education) the extension of this approach has a serious danger: < 0 } { 0 > conduce a desconocer los perfiles propios de este nuevo público y su diferencia irreductible con respecto al de la clientela clásica de la acción social, clientela que se caracterizaba por un déficit personal que la volvía inepta para seguir el régimen común (discapacidad, desequilibrio psicológico, inadaptación social), pero la mayor parte de las nuevas poblaciones con problemas no son inválidas, deficientes o casos sociales. < } 100 { > it leads to not know the profiles typical of this new audience and its irreducible difference as compared to the one of the classic clients of the social action, clients that were characterized by a personal deficit that made it not suitable to follow the common regime (disability, psychological unbalance, social inadaptation) but most of the new populations with problems are not invalid, deficient or social cases. < 0 } { 0 > De hecho, fueron invalidados por la coyuntura, es la transformación reciente de las reglas del juego social y económico la que los ha marginado. < } 100 { > In fact, they were invalidated by the situation, the recent transformation of the social and economic game rules has rejected them. < 0 } { 0 > (...) Toda la gama de procesos de exclusión (ejecución de los criminales de derecho común, destierro o condena para los vagabundos y los sediciosos, represión de las diferencias sexuales, la lepra, la locura) se muestra en el espacio europeo entre los siglos VIII y XIII. () The entire

attributed to the individual is disputing about other approaches facing the neoliberal speech that is self-argued as the only possible one, and under the cover of neutral scientific. Such speech, through pretended descriptive statements, deploys a kind of “explanation economization” of simplification; what this speech has caused is a shortening of public debate and the possibility of opening to other explanations away from the reductionist economist or financial perspective, typically neoliberal. (4) The objection to the unique speech of neoliberalism made among others by Pierre Bourdieu can be provided in two levels: as “theory”, defined as “devoid of socialization and history” and as practice, since systematic destruction of the human bonds can be attributed to it.

This theory consists of putting between brackets the conditions and economic and social structures that are basic condition of its exercise. In the name of this scientific program of knowledge turned into action political program, a huge political work has been carried out, aiming at creating the conditions of performance and operation of the theory: a methodic destruction of acting parties program. This neoliberal program globally intends to favor rupture, dissociation, between economy and social reality. Bourdieu intends

precisely to prove that science called “economy” that has been intended to replace social science, rests on an original abstraction consisting of dissociating a particular category of practice –or a particular dimension of any practice- of the social order where any human practice is immersed; as if economy proclaimed by neoliberal speech had an isolated and independent entity of the society and its context of production and possibility.

The conservative exaltation of individual responsibility leads, for example, to attribute unemployment or economic failure and therefore educational failure, to the people themselves and not to the unfair and unequal social order (Bourdieu, 2002). The person, from the neoliberal perspective, is thought as the one that invents and reinvents himself because of his alleged free will in a society governed by laws of a market that would offer equal opportunities.

As from this speech, the person, seen as de-socialized person, is the highest and almost exclusive responsible one for his good or bad fortune. From this perspective, people fail or succeed in society or in studies due to their individual merits or lack of them. It is the reign of the meritocracy thought outside the social conditions of the subjects.

Added to this exacerbation of individualism, we can also mention that in the nineties another phenomenon arose: failure has had increasingly as new star a significant part of the mean sectors of society. This generates specific differentiation processes: to the old poor, the new poor are added, that is, people or groups without their material assets but owning

explained by Foucault on hospitals for leprosy people, asylums for mad people, jails for criminals).

3) Some categories of population are imposed a special status that allows them co-existing in the community, but takes out some rights and participation in certain social activities. The deprivation of voting rights for women makes an exclusion of this type in the political arena”. Castel, R. (2004); *The tricks of exclusion. Work and social use*. 21 century files collection, Buenos Aires, Topia Editorial.

Other reading suggestions that can enrich the debate and analysis:

-Sennett, R. *La corrosión del carácter*. Personal consequences of work in the new capitalism. Barcelona, Anagrama.

-Bauman, Z. (2005) *Liquid modernity*. Buenos Aires, Economic Culture Fund.

cultural or symbolic assets, such as many years of school or school degrees. In general and acknowledging that the situation of each region and country has its own specific issues, we can recover the proposal by sociologist Emilio Tenti who says the new economic-social configurations



of the “globalization” era proof to be more effective to increase production than to distribute wealth. In other words, we are in times when societies as a whole are wealthier, but also more unequal. (Tenti, 1999).

Undoubtedly, these phenomena have impacted in creation of subjectivity. The understanding of the person in context of exclusion implies wondering then about the personal consequences of structural transformations and presence or absence of material and subjective support. Which are the foundations, or moorings, that support people in times of deep crisis and uncertainties? How to build life narrations in times of fragmentation? How to project when time is seen as evanescent, with no memory and no future?

Subjectivity in times of exclusion

Richard Sennett and Pierre Bourdieu, among other sociologists who analyze contemporary societies, analyze the events and structural transformations of central categories that organize the economic and symbolic order, such as the work category, and personal consequences of the neo-liberal program in configuring identity. The denominations of their works that we will analyze, are eloquent metaphors of the contemporary social issue: **“character corrosion”** and **“misery of the world”**(5). Both metaphors of human drama are framed in structural contexts of deepening of inequality, material and symbolic exclusion, social polarization, violence and des-humanization.

In both cases the perspectives propose a dialectic between the objective and symbolic conditions of production of subjectivity, when linking objective limits or determinations with subjective hopes or expectations. On this regard, we have observed in a research run by Daniel Filmus how the objective limits marked from the beginning to students in their path throughout the school system, that is, as from their constrictions or structural determinations, configure a sense of subjective limits, a kind of advance symbolic calculation of what they can or cannot project for their own social and school career. (Filmus and others, 2001).

Precisely, even with the recognition of external determinants, school acts where the objective limits seem to sentence students; contributing sometimes to force the sense of subjective limits, this is, helping students not to mechanically adapt their wishes and horizons to the limits given to them and expected due to their social condition.

It is then about thinking about acting people and their experiences and careers in terms of historical subjects in particular situations. Thinking the objective constrictions and subjective strategies in terms of relation is the first step to break away with fatalist visions or

with those that involve inevitability of fate and social and educational careers.

It is necessary to assume as necessary starting point to explain people that they are suffering structural constrictions that determine them and form them from outside, this is undeniable, but that at the same time, they help build in interaction their social and educational reality. It is a kind of parole people enjoy: they reproduce the social conditions of exclusion that they suffer in life, and at the same time, they release strategies, more or less aware of the overcoming of those determination chains. In each social act determination and freedom are put at stake; the world of need is at risk by the world of creativity.

The structural determination of social issues darkens the school experience, but, at the same time, we the people build that experience as subjectivation, being far away from determinations.

Which are the non kept promises that have affected us, as people? In the new capitalism, Sennet proposes that the conception of work has substantially changed and the forms of social relationship have been dramatically transformed. In spite of optimist vision of changes promised by neo-capitalism, they are far from mitigating domain practices, which on the contrary seem to have changed their ways. In connection with one of those essential changes, such as the case of flexibility, Sennett argues that, far from offering a better context for personal growth, it is a new way of oppression. The despise of bureaucratic routine and search for flexibility have caused new power and control structures instead of creating conditions for freedom.

What is "new" actually is ductility, flexible work, careers with versatile jobs, not repetitive ones, but without tradition and history. Interpersonal relationships created by neo-capitalism are evanescent, built on fragments. Children do not repeat their parents routine. Therefore, their parents character is not their character. Neither time nor their labor identity. In this same line, neo-liberal speech associates flexibility to youth while rigidity is seen as synonymous of old age.

The special characteristics of time in neo-capitalism have created a conflict and maybe a dissociation between character and experience, experience of a disarticulated time that threatens capacity of people of consolidating their character in lasting narrations. The slogan implemented, according to Richard Sennett, is “nothing in the long run”. And this has consequences: it disorientates the planned action, it dissolves the trust and commitment bonds, and it separates will of behavior. The order “take a risk”, assuming risks, is strongly disclosed by neo-liberal speech. Risk appears as an evidence of character of the person, beyond the fact that everything indicates failure in the long run. From the psychological field, there is a proposal that, as a consequence of those new indications, people produce a kind of "cognitive dissonance".

Work is still the symbolic organizer of social life for people and groups, even for those who are in the margin, unemployed. People do not resign themselves to be left out of all possibilities of social inclusion.

As a supplement to this Sennett’s analysis, the other theoretician we mentioned before, Pierre Bourdieu, has as focus of study of culture, the issue of unequal distribution of power in society, and especially of symbolic power. Its sociology has sought, mostly, to bring to light the mysteries of social institutions, cultural rites and their connection to power. The diagnostic complex of contemporary society, elaborated by the author, brings to the light the dramatic re-concentration of power worldwide, imposed by neo-liberalism, with consequences of growing destruction of civilization and exclusion of wide sector of population from the rights to education, health, culture, safety and social welfare.

What is new in Bourdieu analysis on social tragedy is that it states that this social order is kept and becomes efficient only with complicity of the dominated ones; this is, through symbolic violence. Bourdieu analyzes the central role of symbolic violence in preserving social normality and ways of political action capable of facing the prevailing symbolic order (Bourdieu, 1999).

In this sense, Bourdieu has tried to offer expression and critic tools to enable an autonomous self-reflection in human beings

to release them from symbolic violence exerted by social institutions. What is interesting in “Misery of the world” is that it vividly describes how the “excluded” ones from society live their poverty, which their survival strategies are and which the value of their social isolation is.



These are the waste (undone) of neo-liberal society that face the exacerbated individualism of modern society the best they can. They do not even re-group to create a new excluded sociability.

Bourdieu tells, as Sennett in *The corrosion of character*, the economic and psychologically de-structuring effect of society in the nineties. His interviewed are social agents with no social role, not located by virtue of the resignation of the State-providence of the recent decades that has been left to us as a pitiful legacy with which we have to break up necessarily. The testimonies collected by “the misery of the world” show the lack of protection of social acting people who stopped being such in order to be located outside the areas of work and therefore outside other social exchanges.

In these contexts of exclusive societies, it is observed that youth specially suffers facing a future with no prospects, either due to lack of school, performing studies they did not want, or due to not being able to meet their educational and social expectations.

But it is also true that, in such situations, school, sometimes, is posed as one of the last resources of equal opportunities, carrying out a social-assistance duty, its acting people not being professionally prepared to face it. Teachers assume the challenge and contradictions of trying to alleviate part of the social misery of the students condition. Social suffering becomes a usual way of life of numerous students that is hard to deny. Each institution and teacher

reacts differently facing this student reality: sometimes it rejects them, sometimes it understands them, sometimes it aims at “making those children and teenagers progress”.

We can explain from this type of analysis some learnings. The main issue we can learn as people with school authority is that it is necessary to move forward to understand who those people are, in our case, who those children, teenagers and young people are, who live in those classrooms or who are in the margin of schools. Who are they? What do they expect? What do they fear? Which material and subjective support do they have? How do they see themselves in connection to their future? Is school a place where the essential horizons are widened for them? Inclusion of children, teenagers and young people in the educational system is possible as long as it deepens understanding of subjectivity of students as a point of meeting between policies, material life conditions, expectations and strategies deployed in or in connection to the school institution.

Schools play a main role in mediation between social structure and careers and expectations structured by children, teenagers and young people.

Especially in the same nineties we have already characterized, phenomenon related to violence start appearing in educational environments. In several occasions, teenagers and young people, and recently children, especially of popular sectors, become subject for stigmatizing and defamatory speeches that place them as the reason of part of the evil they have to undergo, insisting on the need of seclusion and strong hand. That is why, besides the fight of speeches and practices, another fight is in the area of judicial policies and practices. There has to be opposition to multiple and diversified devices that extend the criminal network and there has to be a proposal, as possible, of social, sanitary or education alternative. Far from being the solution, imprisonment, in addition to affecting mostly the most deprived groups, is itself a pauperization machine, with effects not only on the prisoners, but also on their families and neighborhoods.

Criminalization of infancy and youth is a kind of speech that

has to be faced, solved, resisted by school.

The sociologist Emilio Tenti poses that the most worrying symptoms of contemporary social question (social exclusion, violence, insecurity, etc.) are originated in an objective process of de-structuration of life conditions typical of global capitalism. However, deepening these differences can be threatening for unity and integration of societies as a whole (social fragmentation risk) (Tenti, 1999.)

These ways of exclusion and labor and social precarization are the ones that bring their contribution in generating disintegrated and disintegrating personalities and behaviors.

The experience of long unemployment, sensation of instability, absence of a sure future or at least a predictable one in certain degree, generate the sensation of impotence and destruction of psychological-sociological defenses associated to a general lack of organization of behavior and subjectivity.

What makes certain people brutal is not a supposed nature given to them or a criminal gene with which they are born; it's the social conditions of exclusive societies that allow multiplication of violent people. Although we will not specifically treat here the issue of violence in school, we sure can frame it in those wider processes of violence and exclusion that affect building subjectivity.

In a recent report made that analyzes childhood and teenage in Argentine press (6) there is an evidence of the distortional look on children and teenagers in the media speech. As far as we are concerned, from social-educational research we verify this look on children and teenagers, in connection to the issue of violence in school spaces (7). Instead of considering children and teenagers as subjects with social risk and without rights, they are seen as people with social danger. What is striking is that children become suspects; society should be protected against them, they are potentially dangerous people. Then, a naive consideration of infancy turns into a criminal and stigmatized vision. Teenagers had already been considered dangerous. What is new,



then, is that also the children start being seen as dangerous for society. In fact, they are called minors rather than children, and it is not surprising that this leads to multiplication and proliferation of pathologies and ways of prosecution.

This goes together with the "criminal severity" that prevails in our societies, mostly for two

decades, that caused, among other effects, quadruplication of prison population and decrease of average age of "criminals", when virtually in all cases they are people of subordinate sectors.

When checking the bibliographic background of this new punishing theory –weakening and stepback of social sector of the State and deployment of criminal arm- (Wacquant, 2000) the book by Charles Murray, *Losing Ground*, appears: American Social Policy 1950/1980, where he states that "excessive generosity of policies of help for homeless would be responsible for increase of United States poverty: it compensates inactivity and leads to moral degeneration of popular classes, and specially those "illegitimate" unions that are the final reason of all evil of modern societies, among them "urban violences". (Wacquant, 2000, p. 26).

From the critical perspective we have, societies are the ones that make people brutal. So, what we should try is to overcome essentialist and substantialist looks on infancy and adolescence, removing the final responsibility they have on their behaviors that are usually called "anti-social" ones.

The misery of society makes men miserable and the social violence makes children and teenagers violent. On this regard, in connection with the different models of behavior of car drivers on the roads, Norbert Elias (8) finds certain associations between the level of economic, social and educational development of the

societies and infringing behaviors that end up in accidents. According to Elias analysis, when there is a high level of civilization, a conduct code and feelings code that stimulates a better uniformity and stability in self-regulation, is not because people are, let's say, civilized in nature. The high standard is a comprehensive part and at the same time a condition and a consequence of the high status of development and also of wealth of a society. The great well-built roads, well signalized and very well planned, cost a lot of money. They are designed by well tempered drivers. And so that not doubt remains on the connection between objective conditions of life and structure of mental habits and conduct models, he states he does not fear talking of societies in different stages of development and they go along with different structures of personality. "Poverty makes people brutal" Elias says and immediately he clarifies "This statement must not be construed in connection with people but with societies". The misery of society makes men miserable". (Elias, 1998, quoted by Tenti, 1999, p. 12) We are in conditions of posing it is necessary to mention a social building of violence in the school field, and to apply, in opposition to an essentialist notion on the violent being, a relational thought.

In an analogy, we state that what makes students violent is not their nature, but social violence.

. In a recent work, Gabriel Kessler (2004)(9) emphasizes the existing discontinuities in school careers of students who commit crimes. These students show careers where they alternate educational, criminal and labor activities, related mostly to the informal sector. This way, it is shown how the limits between exclusive social categories such as the ones of the student,



worker and criminal, and the social limits that separated them, become blurry, leading to its coexistence in the same social person. This shows complexity of school careers.

Until a relatively short period ago, it was not conceivable to associate, on a same young person, categories such as “criminal” and “student”, since they were exclusive within the social belief.

The figure of the student had a spirit of purity and neutrality, hard to sustain today as representation.

It cannot be denied, then, that the objective processes of social exclusion of which young people are one of the most punished targets in the last decades have effects in the area of behavior: aggression, violence, lack of interest in school, delinquency, social disintegration.

Being student, the student condition, is a peculiar category that historically keeps transforming itself as societies do. **Precisely, one of the most relevant educational effects, caused by the crisis of the last decades, is that a kind of *rupture of young and teenagers careers* has occurred: exclusion and social fragmentation processes eliminated the representation of progress that stated that future could be trusted.**

So, coexistence of student condition and worker or unemployed condition, originally thought in education as exclusive categories (that means: you were student or you were worker; one was at school or outside it, working) was turned into mutual imbrications in case of children, teenagers and young people. They are currently students and workers or unemployed, being this mutual imbrications that affects many of our students, strongly different according to the social origin. The way in which the student condition was interpreted, at least in the area of symbolic representations, is altered. It is noticeable that adolescence and youth specially the age range from 15 to 17, is a turning point

in vital careers. It is observed, considering the case of the Argentine, that among teenagers of 18 to 24 years of age, only one out of three studies only, while three out of ten are only dedicated to work. At the same time, 25% of young people of that age range



is not active or unemployed or does not study. (Kaplan, 2005. En Krichesky) Passage and permanence in the educational system also shows that school is not universal anymore, especially since adolescence. Educational institutions are gradually emptied and in ages between 18 and 24 for example in Argentina, only four out of ten teenagers attend an educational institution.

This reality is also associated to the fact that representation of time has unprecedented transformations in our societies. IF the premise is “nothing in the long run” how to sustain permanence in school that needs to transmit “not useful” knowledge today for future use? Is the current effort worth for an uncertain future? Which is the subjective representation of time that prevails in students? Does this representation vary according to the social class? What is the role of social memory? Is the school calendar/period a guide to orient conducts or it does not represent any specific way of self-regulation for students in terms of social subjects?

Norbert Elias (2000) wonders precisely “on time”, as a social symbol of instrumental nature, as a human symbol of orientation and communication, posing again the issue not to fall in traditional philosophy currents such as subjectivism and objectivism.

Time experience is related to the feeling of identity and continuity of people; in fact, time is a way of relation. This means that a critical analysis of “time” category demands understanding the interdependent relation between physical time and social time. For teenagers and young people, and also for those children who have

to collaborate with family survival, does school represent a “lost time” or “waste of time”? What symbol do students have of the “past”, of the “present” and of the “future”? What is the experience of young generations on these three categories that represent future to which they are exposed? To say that we are facing a rupture of careers is to accept the supposition that future is a figuration.

In this sense, the question in connection to young people of today is: Do they perceive there is a future?

How do they articulate their personal fate with their social and educational one? Some ideas of future are in configurations of sense that teenagers have, although it may not be the one the school historically was meant to support; that is, a sustained image of ascending project, relating permanence of students in classrooms to a better future.

A question that comes now is about the expectations of future the students of the school system have, on one hand, and in addition, which the hope of future is that is placed in school by teachers.

All children, young people and adults enter through the same door of the school; although not all of them are equally qualified while entering. Even, there is a doubt in some cases on the convenience of their entering. Facing this doubt and given this strong will of making students progress also there are other school agents that, when looking at students as they go in, start imagining how they could contribute to remove their marks, to overcome the prophecies of an apparently inexorable failure. That means, they do not condemn them nor mark them from the beginning. School here plays a significant role facing social condemning prejudice and

THINK AMONG COLLEAGUES



We suggest talking to your students and among colleagues on the senses of attending school. What do they say on the school-work relationship? What will they do when they finish school?

Sometimes it is enriching to ask students these questions to be closer to their representations on school as a construction of THEIR future expectations.

determinists in connection to the future of students as they go through school.

The entering the school institution in each step of the school pyramid is, then, a turning point in educational careers because it anticipates objective limits and moves subjective hopes.

In addition, not entering, being left out, also implements a prognostic.

In each act of school inclusion or exclusion the objective limits and subjective hopes are tensioned in democratic schools. In this tension the individual and collective teacher has the highest potential of transformation. The inevitable can become, then, probable. There is now a chance that another destiny takes place.

READING SUGGESTIONS



Pérez Gómez, A. I. (1998). *La cultura escolar en la sociedad neoliberal*. Madrid, Morata.

Educational imagination has, from the moment of entering school, a place of subjective production since, even facing school in its most reproductive role, living in it means accepting the disputes territory. The question is to know how to move the forces capable of reaching

that goal and who will be carrying out the work of mobilization from the original more or less implicit pact that students establish with the school.

The look of the condition of the origin of students: The hypothesis of cultural capital as a theoretical alternative

From the characterization made herein on the personal consequences of living in exclusive, violent, unequal, fragmented, polarized societies, we can conclude that school faces a complex challenge aiming at its democratization. In a context of high exclusion and social selection, school has the mandate of inclusion. This leads to wonder how a school in process of overcrowding looks at/identifies/understands/construes/classifies/designates these students in miserable and social suffering conditions.

Is school an institution that emphasizes inequalities or does it try to overcome or at least diminish those origin marks? Which force is prevailing in each classroom, in each institution, in each subjectivation experience? How is that in certain institutions knowledge and linguistic practices brought from home by students are legitimized, while in other cases they are rejected?

From the critical paradigm, Pierre Bourdieu considers that a social system is reproduced not only because the economic production conditions making possible for a structure to be kept are ensured, but because a group of practices tending to model subjective perception and appreciation schemes appears. Those practices are not always explicit; from this the huge difficulty to recognize them or notice them easily or in everyday life when they can go unnoticed, is derived. Also, they use specific institutions to be carried out. With family, school is the place that traditionally makes possible reproduction and cultural production.

The cultural issue is considered then as a principle of differentiation that is almost as powerful as the economic issue; that is why Bourdieu uses the notion of *capital* to evidence the processes of fight for accumulation and appropriation of symbolic power that takes place in the cultural

field. Logic of the symbolic market is analyzed in an analogy to the analysis on the capitalist economic market.

In this sense, in the same way as the economic assets are allocated in a different way in our societies and people do not have the same opportunities to access and have them, in the symbolic market, where the school market is included, a similar logic and dynamic is evidenced. Moreover, the symbolic market ends up attributing a kind of value to each person and group: some of them worth more; others worth less.

As a conclusion: each person ends up appropriating a self-perception of his social and school value and attributing to himself his success or failure. Precisely, the theory of cultural capital intends to explain the processes and mechanisms of inequality inside the educational market. Such perspective is dramatically opposed to the approaches that do not connect the inequality in experiences and careers at school with the conditions and opportunities granted by social and school structure to each person and group.

This theory represents the conceptual alternative facing the usually given reasons on success and failure in school careers that do not connect school performance with the social determinants and school practices that produce and reproduce ways of distinction; placing this way the responsibility in the individual nature ("he is not intelligent enough to study") or social nature ("if the father repeated the course, the son will repeat it too") of each person for his own failure.

The cultural capital theory basically faces the interpretations produced by economic

theories of human capital and with the explanations of the so called "ideology of natural gifts" or natural born gifts. Both pose, beyond their singularities, that the differences in performance have to be found in nature of the person or his



family. Ideology of natural gifts, specially, states something like each of us has come to the world, since we are born, with a kind of organ to learn while others are born without that talent for studying. These suggestions do not question the social or school order. In any case, they “blame” the person for his failure.

From the critical perspective of Boudieu we are referring to, the unequal social and symbolic conditions of access, permanence and possibilities of appropriation are the ones that participate in different processes of education. Surely, there are differences of another kind that participate in processes of appropriation of school knowledge; what we emphasize here is to consider the unequal as different.

Now, what does it mean that students have a different distribution and appropriation of the cultural capital? We are all bearers of a cultural capital that has a differential value in the cultural market, value granted by legitimacy and hierarchy acquired by certain practices and knowledge in a historic and social moment. We can stop for a moment to recognize what the ways of speaking, walking, thinking the world are, that are proposed as “correct” and awarded, this is like legitimized, in our times and particular contexts.

From the moment we are born, we are exposed to ways of thinking and speaking the world, of moving in it, recorded in us as permanent tattoos; marks that are embodied, of which we appropriate and by which we are appropriated, in a double spontaneous and hidden movement. This way, sometimes, the ways of acting and thinking we have, are naturalized, appear for us and for whom surround us as a product of the natural order. These properties, not being natural or inborn, are result of a work of inheritance on the heir and vice versa. That is why there is a repeated statement that family socialization has a determining value on the building of our social identity.

The cultural capital (that exists in three conditions: objective –material assets- , incorporated –thought and action schemes- and institutionalized –degrees or school cards- can be “accumulated”.

Keys to address this issue

“... El capital cultural existe en estado incorporado, es decir, hecho cuerpo en las personas a través de la interiorización de disposiciones duraderas que se inicia en la socialización dentro de la familia y que requiere un trabajo individual que no puede suplirse. Nadie puede aprender por otro a hablar, a caminar o a manejarse espacialmente, ni a gustar de cierta música ni a vestirse a la moda. Es lo que venimos denominando como habitus. Existe también en estado objetivado, hecho cosa, transformado en bienes culturales patrimonio de la sociedad: los libros, los cuadros, los museos, las fotos, etcétera. Por último, hay un estado institucionalizado, legalizado y certificado por el poder estatal que le otorga un estatuto específico que hace intercambiables a sus poseedores: es la credencial educativa que garantiza la existencia de un supuesto capital cultural incorporado en las personas que lo poseen. Las competencias supuestas del portador de la credencial adquieren un valor convencional en el mercado de trabajo. Pensemos cómo se estandarizan los valores de las consultas médicas o psicológicas según zonas, o cómo el Estado establece categorías salariales según el escalafón profesional”.

Gluz, N.; Kantarovich, G. y Kaplan, C. (2002); La autoestima que fabrica la escuela (primera parte). En Carreras, M; Gluz, N.; Kantarovich, G; Kaplan, C; Rosbaco, I. y Verón, S. (2002); La escuela: una segunda oportunidad frente a la exclusión. Buenos Aires, Ediciones Novedades Educativas,.

That it can be accumulated means recognizing that it is not distributed equally and therefore it acquires differential values in the scenarios where we are involved. School, far from being neutral and equal as seen by the visions of socialization, considers as “legitimate” culture the one corresponding to the dominating social class, granting differential proposals and treatment to students according to the distance or proximity regarding their cultural models. Obviously these differential treatments and appreciations are hidden, implicit. Even the teachers themselves sometimes do not know they are unconsciously contributing to reproduce that differential valuation.

School, in many occasions, implicitly, reinforces some of them and weakens others, weakening even the most pauper ones, which is closely related to the social economic and cultural conditions of belonging of the students. Through the subtle mechanisms the school legitimates, with no intention, a social difference when considering the social heritage as natural heritage.

And in no intention, in hiding this process, is where you find the guaranty of its efficiency.

Students configure diversified educational careers in terms of their belonging to a class, genre, ethnical group; all these categories of distinction or social differentiation. In this sense, from critical positions, the social-cultural conditions of students are the breaking point and frame of all the subsequent evaluation of individual conditions for school learning. This is, from the critical position of existing social order, inequalities and social-cultural differences of students cannot be construed outside the social ways of valuation and rejection of certain people and groups.

Educational success and failure is a cultural construction that reassures or rejects the parameter with which students enter school already classified. This is, school classification has many times implicit the social classification of origin of the students.

In other words, separating in the analysis of students careers the possibilities to learn shown by certain people and groups, from the understanding of their material and symbolic possibilities for school life, is to fall into a biological determinist reductionism or cultural determinist one. Those determinisms, present in common sense, put the blame of success or failure in education in certain attributes inherent to the subjects.

The career of a student and his social position have a degree of statistic association, since the end points are not equally probable as compared to the starting points. If a student has an unequal starting point, he has in fact less possibilities to arrive at certain end points; mostly because he will end up many times self-excluding himself from certain horizons. In configuration of school careers there is interaction between the objective conditions (social-cultural, family, institutional) and subjective ones (habits in terms of incorporated cultural capital: manners of seeing and acting the world) and as from the relation between them, students build certain actions and strategies (not rational) with certain autonomy, to keep and/or improve his school positioning. Finally, what this theory of cultural capital tells us is that school failure is not consequence of the fact that children

READING SUGGESTIONS



-Braslavsky, C. (1985). *La discriminación educativa en Argentina*. Buenos Aires, Grupo Editor Latinoamericano.

-Baudelot, Ch. y Establet, R. (1971). *La escuela capitalista en Francia*. México, Siglo XXI, Cap. 1 y 2.

y jóvenes no tengan supuestos dones o capacidades intrínsecas para aprender ni debido a que sus familias son deficitarias o carentes culturales. Precisamente, estos dos modos de abordar el fracaso son los que Bourdieu intenta cuestionar. Para él, el éxito o fracaso escolar se debe a que la distribución de los bienes culturales y educativos es desigual en nuestras sociedades, por responder a la lógica del mercado

excluyente. El fracaso de ciertos individuos y grupos se comprende en tanto que no poseen las mismas oportunidades de acceso ni de permanencia ni de apropiación frente al mercado escolar.

Desde esta perspectiva crítica los fracasos sociales y educativos no son inexorables y, por ende, pueden revertirse. Ello nos abre la puerta para buscar caminos para superarlos. Uno de los caminos es bucear en los procesos que tienen lugar en la interacción maestro alumno, más particularmente en los lentes con los que la escuela mira a los alumnos, a partir de los cuales ellos construyen una imagen acerca de sus límites y posibilidades.

Hemos observado en nuestras indagaciones que la percepción habitual de los maestros sobre el éxito o fracaso tiende a naturalizar las diferencias que surgen de la apropiación diferenciada de un capital cultural, atribuyéndolas a causas naturales (“capacidades innatas”, “no le da para las matemáticas”) o al medio familiar cosificado (“de un padre obrero, se espera un hijo obrero” o bien el argumento que sostiene que el fracaso escolar de un niño depende del padre quien es portador de una historia escolar de fracaso). En la creencia del docente hay un desconocimiento de las condiciones de realización de sus juicios. Más aun, en la vida cotidiana escolar, las clasificaciones producidas respecto de los estudiantes tienden a hacerse olvidar como tales, en tanto son generadas y a la vez son generadoras de las prácticas educativas. (Kaplan, 1992; Kaplan, 1997)

Mirar cómo son mirados los alumnos quizás nos permita estar en mejores condiciones para ampliar y resignificar ciertas “visiones invisibilizadas” en un horizonte de democratización escolar, haciéndonos conscientes de que también la escuela produce subjetividad.

Student careers: the implications of the student's skills

The concept of social or school career puts us close to a dialectic understanding of different itineraries that agents are forming throughout their lives. Far from thinking that to certain starting positions correspond only certain end points, although we showed they are pretty much interdependent, there are also spaces of rupture and break. Although social and school career has close relationship to class, genre and ethnic positions, it does not depend on them since it is put in connection to at least three dimensions: material conditions, subjective sphere (representations, expectations, feelings) and strategies, not always rational ones, that with a certain kind of autonomy are formed by agents when forming their paths.

Thinking of school as a space for possibilities, giving it the capacity to twist destinies presented as inevitable, involves overcoming duties traditionally attributed to it. This does not mean to be in a pedagogical optimist position or merit based position, but to understand that, together with the most studied duties of reproduction of social order, school has a production role of the social issues.

This means that, with determinations that form the student careers, there are margins of freedom to force those limits. If careers were totally prefixed (in terms of social origin or educational level of parents or school background of siblings, among many objective factors) we would not understand why teachers, professors, directives, support teachers, specialists, cabinet people, inspectors, central management officers, try and insist on making progress the students with whom they everyday interact in direct ways.

The history of school which is mostly history of concrete teachers in relation to concrete students, has a lot of evidence

that, even in deep crisis contexts, school can represent a chance.

At the same time, material conditions in life of students explain a great part of their performance, but they do not explain how some families and people generate strategies that resist or overcome part of the limits imposed to them.

Dynamics of school joins singularly in each institution and classroom the question of limits imposed and relative options of freedom. And the more the unequal starting points are recognized, with which students go through school, the better we are in conditions of operating on them trying to overcome them, or at least, to reduce the negative effects.

If we refer to student careers, it is necessary first to eliminate the idea that paths traveled by students through the educational system are homogeneous, linear and predictable in all aspects. Although it is real that one could provide types of frequent and suitable itineraries, coinciding with school structure (courses, cycles, levels), it is true also that great part of children and teenagers go through school in heterogeneous, variable and contingent ways. Social conditioning, and also subjectivities created by school, play both a central role.

What is questioned is the much extended vision regarding social and educational careers sustained on ideal notions of regularity, homogeneity and normality. New positions emphasize the need to



analyze also the plurality and diversity in concrete and contradictive itineraries that characterize the transit through the school system. This way, analysis on construction of educational itineraries in schools must add the socialization processes to the ones of subjectivation.

SUGGESTIONS TO WATCH



To reflect on dichotomy tension “omnipotence-impotence” in which school is situated many times, and how many times institutions and teachers can contribute to favor symbolic conditions of student careers we suggest watching the movie *Sery Tener*.



(Director: Nicolas Philibert, France, 2002)

Summary: Inspired in French phenomenon of unique class, it shows life of a small class of a town in a whole course, showing us the warm and calm look to primary school in the heart of the French land. A group of students between 4 and 10 years old, gathered in the same class, are trained in all subjects under custody of only one teacher of extraordinary devotion. Teacher of calm authority, professor Georges Lopez conducts the children to adolescence, mediating in their disputes and listening to their problems.

understanding both processes as complementary ones.

Now, are other student careers possible?

This is where the school has the opportunity to promote and participate on careers that can become choices for some students and their families.

At school, in spite of their problems, they see even the traces of promise of social inclusion. Even with all the mistakes, school redoubles the bet in its capacity to produce a powerful territory for cultural resistance and symbolic revolution. It appears as one of the few social spaces with strength to give name to children and teenagers that are not protected and to return to them voices that were silent due to their social economic original condition, to their singular cultural identity, their sexual choice, ethnic origins or differential qualities for learning.

School is the possibility that they can establish the first relation as people with the State, the opportunity to start building their own condition of citizens, although school is questioned in

READING SUGGESTIONS



-Dubet, F. y Martucelli, D. (1998) *En la escuela. Sociología de la experiencia* Buenos Aires, Losada.

its role of bridge with society in which they will have to be inserted. Or even, facing school in his more reproductive role, to live in it means to accept the dispute territory. School is a place of meeting, it offers opportunities every day, inside and in its limits with society. You cannot forget that its reason for being, its founding condition as space of a wider system was connected to inclusion of great urban masses to the society. And that initial promises has to be considered in times when we propose to give new sense to school, to think again how to live better in it.

One of the main challenges consists of contributing to strengthen school as a singular space of social and filiations integration, that allows those who go through it to dare fates that appear as inevitable. In spite of that, we must not disregard tension of modern school, put in the integrating mandate in opposition to selection of talents.

Considering the latter we can wonder how can school contribute to improve symbolic conditions of students careers?

We the ones that belong to the school field have a tendency to oscillate between two suggestions: either we are deeply rooted voluntarists or we are extremely fatalists. Facing this dichotomy and facing adversity of social context, it is necessary to re suggest the tension of the omnipotence-impotence pair.

School through multiple mechanisms impacts on school experience of people, therefore, there is a lot more to do, to reinforce those inclusive mechanisms and to decrease the effects of structure exclusion. Facing illusion of homogenization and equity proposed from the modern school, and mostly in the current context, a critical view is imposed on its practices and speeches, recognizing its potential in terms of space for action.

At this point the view is positioned on the place of mediation between social structure and school as territory of construction of subjectivity. More specifically, it is about bringing to the analysis the question of configuration of minds and expectations that social agents put at stake in their careers, so that the view on processes taking place at school are enriched.

Questions we are formulating are related to the degree in which objective structures pre-existing to us determine our social history, our horizons and even our personal biographies. At the same time, we wonder what is that makes students of the same social sector, genre and nationality build different strategies and school careers.

A first consideration to cover the problem leads to consider that school experience of students is built in connection to the double game of socialization and subjectivation.

Social theory today is suggesting that training of subjects depends on a double process. On one hand, socialization leads to interiorization of standards and social rules by individuals; on the other hand, subjectivation leads them to keep distance in connection to their socialization. Then, school careers are overgoing in part the social conditions of production not chosen by people and not managed at will, and at the same time, they clearly show expression of senses and expectations the subjects are drawing.

These two processes are not articulated naturally. Maybe naturalization of this articulation was reinforced by socializing efficacy of school during a long period of time, that allowed training of social subjects. In this sense there was an overlapping between social position and subjectivity. But today we are far from seeing this concordance, and the duty of school is not to transmit social rules configuring personalities according to them.

In our context school is shaken by different elements. Dubet and Martuccelli (1998) state that three basic processes are the ones that impact on the socializing capacity of the school. First they state *“installation of strategic bond with studies in a school that operates as a market”*. The second element consists of *“growing lack of adjustment between expectations of students and professors; this is linked to overcrowding and autonomy of youth life”*. Finally they state *“the relative uncertainty of the cultural model of the school itself, calling figures of the individual that are widely contradictory”* (Dubet and Martuccelli, 1998, p. 433).

In dynamics acquired by school experience, according to Dubet and Martuccelli (1998), three logics cross:

- Logic of socialization, understood as mechanisms of social integration where students learn rules and legitimated roles.
- Strategic logic through which these people configure a limited rationality combining the nature of their resources and their interests; and
- subjectivation logic through which the student is far from the culturally available things to generate a mechanism of self-criticism through which he is autonomous.

The individual is the one that articulates singularly these logics so, beyond strong social determinations on school experience, there is a work for which each student is socialized and built as a subject, giving sense and coherence to his path through school.

Recognition of these three logics is a new element in analysis of school experience. There is here a person that does all his personal work, a significance through which he gives sense to the passage through institutions.

School is no longer an exclusively socializing institution; in it different logics cross, on which new symbolic possibilities can be opened. *“Genesis of school experience defines stages of socialization and modalities of training of people. In each moment, the person must constitute, beginning with provided obligations, an experience”* (Dubet and Martuccelli, 1998, p. 434)



The school and the power of naming

The socialization, subjectivization and strategic logics of individuals are not built in the social space. These are created in particular schools, through discursive forms, and specific classification and naming systems, which are not exercised without resistance, reply and submission practices.

Thus understood, the educational institution works as a creator of subjectivity. Through different mechanisms and meanings, students form a self-image and expectations that are specifically translated into a singular educational experience. In this formation of self-image, words have an undeniable symbolic power. School language and ways of school naming have an impact on the school self-esteem that students internalize in their experience in the educational system.

From a critical position, social sciences have been emphasizing the symbolic power of language in the creation of social and educational reality. The structuring power of words and names is pointed out by Bourdieu for various social fields such as literature, art, education, politics and fashion. The ability of words to prescribe under the appearance of describing, as well as revealing under the appearance of expressing, is indisputable. Consequently, it is necessary to place a founded suspicion over the supposed innocence and the so-called "beauty" of the excessive use of certain metaphors in the social and educational speech given they are nothing but an effective discursive strategy serving the "naturalization" of beliefs and ideas that are dominant in our cultures. The idea that some students have a learning "ceiling", that others are "blockheads" or the notion of "genius" are expressions of this type of beliefs.

What is the sense of the interest in knowing and revealing the mechanisms of cultural and educational reproduction where language plays a central role? The interest is in, as Piaget would say, the opening of "*the new possibilities*": by *pedagogic utopias*. Systematically examining the assessments that teachers make on students, which

are tacit or implicit in our vision of the world, helps thinking in those Piagetian “*new possibilities*”. All in all, it is a matter of interpreting the classifications that teachers make on a daily basis in their judgments on students, present or potential, to reveal the social functions of that classification system that operates as practical knowledge. Said deeply hidden categorization system is at the beginning of all those school classifications and of the social classifications that determine and legitimize.

One of the main hypotheses we use is that the recitals of the teaching judgment are related to the social origin of students. This means that teachers appear to be making an assessment in keeping with the educational context when many times what they are doing, in an implicit way, is making a disguised social judgment on students.

Social classifications and taxonomies describe and, at the same time, prescribe realities. They provide division principles and views of the social world. They have an interested, arbitrary and prescriptive nature. They mark out what can be thought.

To provide a typical case, let's mention that in Bourdieu and Saint Martin's research (1975) on “the categories of the teaching judgment” the authors have classified the adjectives the teacher uses in the judgments he/ she makes about his/ her students. The authors regrouped these adjectives from the most pejorative to the most laudatory. A first conclusion to which they arrived shows the way the most favorable evaluations appear increasingly frequently as the social origin of students becomes higher.



Assessments, judgments, evaluations and notes have an influence on the image the teacher makes of the student. However, researchers have observed that, with equal or equivalent notes, the assessments or adjectives used to refer to students are more severe and more brutally expressed,

i.e., fewer euphemisms, when the social origin is low.

On many occasions, adjectives and evaluations euphemistically express distinctive properties as signs of social “quality”. Consequently, what is important is that sometimes teachers mark up students who bear the marks of exclusion, this time with the language they use to adjectivize their school work. And what is most impressive is that these types of adjectives, which are communicated to students in a more or less explicit way, are internalized gradually by them. Thus, we listen to explanations that children themselves and/ or families make in case of an educational failure, such as: “I wasn't born for this”, “the thing is that he/ she is not smart enough”. Symbolic violence is exercised through a power that is not named, which hides strength relationships.

Here, the makeup of the social self-esteem of students in the educational institution is put at risk in the sense that they are continuously directing their efforts into adopting an image of themselves and their own school performance, considering the point of view of teachers as authorized individuals.

The student is a perceived being, a being destined to be defined in his/ her truth by the perception or expectations of others. The naming acts directed to him/ her can have a strong correlate in his/ her self-evaluation.

Ways of school naming: the categories of “poor student” and “smart student”

The descriptive and prescriptive power of certain educational judgments is the result of a socio-historical process of determination that has been hidden by the same logic of social processes. We can thus define the classifications and categories that the school reproduces and produces as a result of social struggles and conflicts that underlie the fictitious naturalness with which they appear in their everyday existence.

The differences from which a division of the students is made incorporated, since their origin, qualities and virtues that are not exclusively educational but also social, labor and others.

Therefore, qualities with which students are categorized can never be treated as attributes themselves. Their social and relational nature allows for the examination of their socio-historical creation dimension. The symbolic struggle due to these divisions among students gives rise to an interpretation of them as strongly settled as well as contingent.

One of the typical names students are referred to and that has become quite usual is “poor”. In exclusion contexts, this can even appear as something clear, as a judgment or evaluation that only puts into words what is obvious. However, I express here the concern that I suspect of what is obvious because, in my opinion, naming some students as being poor is not a harmless expression.

Naming is never an innocent act; particularly if the power of naming comes from a higher authority, a recognized and socially authorized individual.

The name “poor” of the student shows his/ her social conditions and, at the same time, hides his/ her tacit senses. “State-assisted”, “intern”, “fed at the community dining hall”, “from parents who are beneficiaries of

social plans”; all these are evaluations related to the symbolic representation of the “poor”, in an attempt of the school to account for the great and little poverty of the students who make up the majorities. At the same time, we can say that this attributes assigned to students, such as “beneficiaries”, “interns”, and “financially subsidized”, involve other images if we consider that there are social universes, like the school, where the presence or search of the strictly financial aid is not advised by explicit rules or implicit imperatives.

Numerous researches, many of which are kept within the bounds of the discipline of education’s sociology, demonstrate the symbolic implications of the focused policies for the target population. We are interested in particularly stressing one of the possible effects of these policies: the risk of stigmatization and ghettoization of beneficiaries and the resulting impact hindered in their subjectivity. In the case of the assignment of focused assistance, the creation of the appropriate properties to access the category of beneficiary implies, in some way, the assignment of an identity. “In this way, some individuals go from being ‘statistically poor’ to socially considered and treated as poor”, thus establishing certain separate social categories, subject to state assistance (Tenti, 1991). Sociologist Erving Goffman(10) (1989), states that throughout history societies have established different mechanisms through which people are categorized, laying down those attributes perceived as normal and natural for each of them. What is essential in this process is that those attributes transform, in turn, in normative expectations for categorized individuals.

An attribute is translated into a stigma when it produces a great discredit in others (Goffman, 1989). Therefore, the individual who has a stigma will try to find a way to hide it, for considering it embarrassing, making it, in some occasions, more evident (precisely due to such effort to hide it).

In every society, there are stigmatization processes through which certain characteristics appear as undesirable, causing, in most cases, discrimination and

social differentiation. A “rational” theory of the stigma is drawn up, through which the superiority-inferiority of individuals is explained. In our everyday speech, we use, as a metaphor and image source, terms specifically referred to the stigma, such as disabled, handicapped, retained student, forgetting, in general, about their actual meaning.

Stigmatization becomes strong and effective, given that, on the one hand, it appears as something natural; attributes assigned to the other become invisible as socio-historical constructions, and they are then considered natural attributes: thus, for example, it is believed that women are essentially docile, tidy, and good for upbringing and housework. These attributes that become essential elements of the individual create inequality situations; on the other hand, inequality is recognized as it is forgotten that the limits set between what is desirable and undesirable are a consequence of history.

Classification-stigmatization acts are translated into naming acts through which that and those named are created. In this way, in general, the individual who is stigmatized assumes as his/ her own the attributes with which he/ she is classified explaining his/ her destiny as part of his nature. Through judgments, classifications, and verdicts made by the educational institution, each child starts knowing his/ her limits as well as his/ her possibilities.

Certain judgments may become stigmatizing and may be based on social prejudices rather than on assumed characteristics of students. The ways in which students and their characteristics and features are referred to make more sense than the one they appear to have, and they meet purposes that go beyond the explicit intention of describing them.

This kind of analysis does not intend to blame the teachers, who, like students, offer resistance and establish break points against stigmatizing practices and speeches. However, today more than ever, it is necessary to be alert when facing those present in the educational institution on a daily basis and in an implicit way and who can act as a reinforcement of educational inequality.

For symbolic possibilities of left out groups to be increased,

it is important that the school is willing to confront suppositions and beliefs very deeply rooted in certain individuals and groups. In significant exclusion contexts, the school that has the intention of making inclusions must be alert against the stigmatization mechanisms of poverty.

By naming him/ her “poor”, the truth is that poverty can be treated as an essential feature of the student. Additionally to this name, the individual has a self-perception of being intrinsically poor. Individualized and individualizing poverty, which is not the same as the report of the socio-historical condition of certain individuals and groups’ poverty, appears as the first term of the relationship with the school and as constituent of the social personality, operating as some sort of original social identity card.

We could support the hypothesis that the division of students in accordance with dualism between poor people and those who are not poor reinforces an opposition system equivalent to social taxonomies. Poverty unifies and separates at the same time; this quality is asserted as predominant and others are dismissed. It gets those who are equal together and brings them face to face with others, although this relational nature of adjectivization dichotomic forms, which are behind the views and divisions of the student's world, remains masked behind the speech and individualizing practices. The implicit nature of this type of educational judgment is one of the conditions that accentuate its power. The problem, and the resulting challenge, then lies in revealing which the parameter used for these verifications is and for what the purpose. Other risk, without excluding those described up to this point, involves considering poverty as an attribute that creates differences, dealt with as diversities, among children. By that I mean that it is necessary to be aware of the fact that sometimes they are mistaken for inequality, exclusion, poverty, and diversity, as if they were practically equivalent terms. Inequality is not the same as diversity, although in many cases they intertwine.

I would like to stress, with this lack of equivalence, that the student’s social condition of being poor is not a characteristic of his/ her universe, even though it appears in certain speeches. The term “diversity” has a sufficiently polysemous and ambiguous use so as to make this supposed encounter of meanings easier.

At this point of the line of argument, what is shown is that, through these subtle mechanisms, the “poor” student is established as an identity socially known almost exclusively by that typical name. It is as if being poor was the most relevant quality of students, as if they were defined almost exclusively by their original social condition.

As counterpart of these reinforcement mechanisms, individuals negotiate and struggle in this social game of naming; of course, with unequally distributed powers.

The truth is that language and particularly names operate as socio-political categories.

Then, it is not random that critical theorists analyze schools in two ways: as classification mechanisms where student selected groups are favored as regards their race, class, gender, ethnic group and, at the same time, as agents to provide social and individual power.

There is an intention to understand individuals without stigmatizing them with embarrassing attributes. Poverty is a condition of admission of the student. It is not a synonym of failure or predefined social destiny. The initial marks of inequality exist, this is undeniable, but they are not permanent and indelible.

The dispute must be centered in preventing that the student condition of poverty is crystallized, transforming it, at the same time, in an inevitable self-attribution. The fatalism of poverty can be settled if we consider, as a valid option, “preserving” the qualities of the “poor child” in some kind of naturalism of poverty. This is the reason why the starting point we must assume is that poverty is not a condition inherent to the student; it is not a part of his/ her human nature and, therefore, it does not establish an inevitable fate.

Other typical name usually set as comparison parameter among students is in connection with the attribute of intelligence. In several speeches, poverty is associated to the lack of intelligence of the student to justify certain school failures.

Historically, intelligence has been one of the instruments with which societies have legitimated social inequality. From that,

there has been an intention to account for the school performance of some vulnerable groups (poor people, women, natives, immigrants). Intelligence has become an assumed objective and universal measure that distinguishes people or human natures, thus justifying social and educational success and failure.

The importance of analyzing speeches about intelligence, in conflict around the dispute between the supremacy of nature and the environment, lies mainly in:

- recognizing its symbolic power, given that they impact in the identity of those who are classified, and in their social and educational experience,
- the intention of reporting aspects that work as a mechanism of this “infernal machine” that is neoliberalism; since, protected most times by science and objectivity, they do nothing more than reinforce and legitimize, through the naturalization of social matters, an unequal and unfair order, which justifies social and educational exclusions. After the affirmations of the speeches of biological determinism (that considers intelligence as an innate ability or natural gift) and of environmental determinism (that considers the family and the environment in which the student lives are limits insuperable by his/ her education), that is, from inside and outside the scientific field, success and failure are attributed to inherited, innate differences or those that result from the work performed in the heart of each family, hiding and legitimizing a social and educational structure characterized by inequality. The intelligence conceived as an objective and absolute measure, given to some people and refused to others by nature, presents itself to pedagogical individuals as a justification of their educational success or failure, transforming itself into an immutable limit that predicts destiny. In the case of an educational failure, inequalities in learning conditions are invisible and transform, by some sort of social alchemy, into an intelligence deficit, assumed as their own.

The impact of these speeches on the social and educational experience is so strong that those individuals who are excluded from certain scenarios, due to social injustice and the cultural capital, are self-excluded providing themselves with the reasons for which they are excluded. In short, the idea that those who reach certain classes in the educational pyramid are the most fit, capable, and intelligent is adopted.

According to Bourdieu (1999), some kind of social Neodarwinism where the most bright and talented people are the ones who succeed is established. *"There are winners and losers, there is nobility, what I call State nobility, i.e., people that have every attribute of nobility in the medieval sense of the word and owe their authority to education, that is to say, according to them, to intelligence, developed as a divine gift, when we really know that it is spread throughout society and educational differences are social differences"*. (p. 102).

Against practices and speeches that attribute exclusion and inequality to matters referred to intelligence, there are those that, in democratic positions, insist on revealing and denaturing them as expressions of discrimination and racism.

The democratic school will recognize the varied starting conditions of students, not as defects or objectives, but as dimensions the institution must know and on which it must work with the purpose of creating strategies that help reduce the differences in power between individuals belonging to different groups and classes.

As a response against perspectives that naturalize intelligence, a less dominant and promissory approach examines exactly the social conditions that make possible the return at present of social speeches that disrupt social inequalities due to intelligence differences, treating social cases as psychological cases, that is, transmuting

To think among colleagues



¿Cuáles son frases, que habitualmente se escuchan en la escuela, y que parecen indicar un destino para un alumno de una vez y para siempre? Estas frases, ¿aparecen enunciadas por quiénes? (maestros, padres, profesionales con quienes trabajamos en las escuelas, etc.). ¿Qué construcción se hace de los alumnos en esas apreciaciones? Detengámonos un instante a conversar acerca de esas frases que "configuran destinos"

Reading Suggestions



- Bourdieu, P. y Saint Martin, M. (1990) *La distinción: categorías del discurso profesoral*. Eri: Propuesta Educativa, Buenos Aires No 9, No. 19.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990) "El racismo de la inteligencia". En: *Sociología y cultura*. México, Grijalbo.
- Perrenoud, Ph. (1990) *La construcción del éxito y del fracaso escolar*.

social injustice and considering them as pathologies, in short, individualizing what is predominantly a socio-cultural product.

Therefore, from an alternative point of view, an exposure of the scientific assumptions included in the old and updated biological determinism is explicitly considered. This disclosure



attempts to insist on the political and ideological content of the premises maintained by biologicistic determinists and, consequently, it is a part of the struggle for educational equality.

Bearing in mind that the measurement of intelligence is historically contingent means breaking the hypothesis that social and educational inequalities are the consequence of a supposed nature, which is considered universal and ahistorical and, therefore, essential. Defenders of biologicistic determinism have spent more than a century trying to impose the view that the contradiction between equality and inequality, which is provided in the structure and operation of democratic political systems, is an inevitable contradiction since it is the order of what is natural.

If intelligence is the way of operationalizing racism, which is typical of the dominant class in capitalism, it is possible to ask oneself what happens when there is an intention to guarantee the continuity in school of those who supposedly do not have the credit of intelligence but the social condition of poverty.

The role of the teacher: The scope of action within the social conditionings

In the previous section it was shown the impact on the subjectivity of the students who adopt certain types of the symbolic denomination. The teacher is also able to denominate other subjects, open new paths, possibilities and futures.

The work of Álvarez Uría is placed within this line of thought that stands out the character, in the end rather undetermined, of the social action. In his article “Escuela y Subjetividad” [*School and Subjectivity*](11), he takes some aspects of the autobiography of Albert Camus to think over about the role of the school in the creation of possible alternatives to destinies that appear to be unavoidable.

The educational trajectory of Albert Camus developed below will make possible to establish that, given certain institutional strategies and with high expectations of the teacher, the school is placed as an environment that opens new horizons of life. It is worth mentioning that Albert Camus is considered to have become a well-known writer. In spite of the objective determinants of him coming from a poor home, being born to an uneducated family and losing his father in his early childhood, he managed to push his way in the world of the letters and the words.

The question that arises is: How did this poor boy manage to overcome his own constraints and transform them into an opportunity? The answer, or at least a big part of it, will be found in the symbolic role that the school had, and, most of all, in the future hope that a teacher set in the students of the primary school attended by Camus.

We should go beyond those arguments stating that it was the outstanding intelligence of Camus that made him overcome in his social trajectory what was denied to him because of the constraints of life of his social and family origin. It is not an outstanding intelligence, nor an immeasurable effort what explains that Camus defied his destiny to fail (although, of course, these factors made some difference),

but the fact that, from the social and cultural analysis proposed in this work, it is possible to assure that in this case there was a conjunction of both: a committed school, represented by the image of the teacher-educator of the people, and the help of the family of the student, which together generate the conditions to make an alternative destiny real. It cannot be denied that all was based on the irrepressible desire that Camus had to immerse himself in the Literary world; passion transmitted to him at school.

When the school becomes democratized, the educator teaches more to those that have less and trusts more in those that trust the least in themselves due to the social disbelief of which they are objects. It is precisely the school experience of some schools what evidences that it is not in every case that the educational trajectories are a reconfirmation of the points of origin.

To think of the school as a builder of subjectivity, and the potential role that the teachers have for that, imply the identification of a certain possibility of improving the conditions in which the students develop their trajectories. This attempt is aimed at refusing to confirm one of the most negative consequences of our times: the exclusion and the consequential lack of possibilities.

The truth is that for the children and adolescents of the middle classes there is continuity between the family and the school. Due to the incorporation of the middle-class sectors to the processes of exclusions, even this premise would be doubtful. However, it is undeniable that for the students of the popular sectors, the school is an environment different from their habitual environment, a place that opens a gate to the unknown, to a new world hidden until then, both for them and their families.

According to Camus, the school represents a world different from the family environment, the world of the letters and the words.

The autobiographical narration of Albert Camus in *El primer hombre* [*The First Man*] evidences the way in which, under certain institutional conditions and strategies of subjectivation promoted by some teachers, the school can become a creative environment. In this respect, Camus writes about the school that: it not only offered a getaway from the family life characterized by

indigence, but, in the class of Mr. Bernard, his teacher, with capital letters, the school was the nourishment for a more essential hunger in the children: the hunger of discovery. In the class of this teacher, they felt for the first time that they existed and that they were object of a high consideration: they were considered to deserve to discover the world.

Faced to an apparent meaningless life, the students were considered important at school. The teacher called them; listened to them; showed them with facts and words that they were meaningful in his pedagogical proposal.

The difference between a teacher and a professional educator could not be better defined in the narration of Camus. The educator teaches a packed, serial knowledge, whereas the teacher transmits, above all, the implications in the search of the truth. Camus makes it clear when he states that the class with Mr. Bernard was always interesting, just because the students recognized that he passionately loved his work.

A poor school, located in a poor neighborhood, attended by the children of poor families, had a teacher who was able to stimulate the hunger of discovery. Camus was totally aware of the fact that, after school, nothing was going to be the same. The teacher had led him to the world when he tried hard to make Camus' family send him to the lyceum, assuming at the same time the responsibility of uprooting Camus so that he could make more important discoveries. For the children such as Albert Camus, the lyceum was not an option, since they were supposed to directly start working after school, in order to support their families.

In spite of the self-exclusion of the family to continue studying, this teacher pressed the grandmother and, at the same time, devoted many hours and days apart from the habitual school schedule to prepare students for the lyceum.

Albert Camus cannot be more explicit about what the school and that teacher who stimulated him despite the material misery tingling his life represented for him: at school he found the children of popular sectors « [...] which was impossible to find at home, where the poor and ignorance made life harsh, devastating, aimless; closer in itself

Misery is a fortress with no bridge to pass by”. This teacher made them believe they deserved to discover the world, that other world so different from their daily one.

There is no magical formula to make passion for knowledge contagious. Each teacher creates his own formula with the interpersonal encounter that takes place in the classroom. Between the well-known Albert Camus of *El primer hombre* and that little Albert that attends school, there is a huge gap; but in the passageway between the famous intellectual and the child fascinated by the snow, there is the school and, in it, his teacher and friend.

In November 1957, after being awarded the Nobel Prize, Camus writes to Mr. Bernard: *«I have been awarded too big an honor that I have not sought nor asked for. However, when I got the news, I first thought of my mother and then I thought of you. Without you, without that gentle hand you lent the poor boy I was, without your hopes and your example, nothing of this would have taken place. It is not that I deem an honor of this kind too high. But, at least, it does give me the chance to tell you what you have meant and what you still mean to me; and to prove that your efforts, your work and the generous heart you dedicated are still alive in one of your pupils who, even through the years, is still your thankful little student»*. The autobiographical narration of Camus becomes more touching as it arrives the moment of leaving school. It is then narrated the visit of the teacher to the family of young Camus, with the purpose of convincing the grandmother to allow the child to sit for the entrance exam of the Lyceum. There, again, is the teacher, in the morning of the exam, at the still closed door of the Lyceum, with his four students who are a bit scared. Together with the previous recommendations to the exam, Mr. Bernard stated: *«Do not get nervous—he kept repeating—. Read carefully the statement of the problem and the topic of the composition. Read them several times. You have enough time»*. In that rite, he was also putting at stake his own future as a guide of followers.

The admission to the Lyceum meant, however, the farewell to the neighborhood and to the school, the farewell to the teacher and the friend, to leave behind the protective world of the family: *«[...] with this success, it has just been taken from*

«[...] with this success, he has just been removed from the innocent and warm world of the poor, a world closed in itself like an island in the society, but in which misery is the family and the solidarity, to be ready to be thrown to a non known world that it wasn't his, in which he could not believe that the teachers were wiser than his teacher of his own heart that knew it all, and from that moment onwards he was going to learn, understand with no help, become a man without the help of the only man that helped him, he had to grow and study alone, to the highest price.» . The success of the school was, indeed, a point of no return.

The symbolic power of the teacher is so evidenced in the role of the teacher and the school in the building of new symbolic horizons. Different types of research have proposed to describe the manner in which the school daily creates judgments and hierarchies, all of which have a high impact on the performance of the students at school. This section basically stands out the positive impact that certain teaching practices have over the careers of the students who are socially hindered.

A good example of these studies about the power of the expectations of the teacher over the school performance of the student has as its main background an investigation that made an impact on the following studies, with the title: “Pygmalion en la escuela” [Pygmalion in the Classroom]

It was a classical experiment from where the researchers established as main hypothesis that “In a given class, the children who the teacher expects to do well will, indeed, show said development”. Through research, they discovered the great impact that the expectations of the teacher have over the intellectual ability of the students in their school performance. This way, as a means of prophecies Self fulfilling

prophecies, the expectations of performance of teachers are translated into certain school results of their students. The conclusions could be summarized in a kind of equivalences that show that the higher the expectations of the teacher, the better



performance of the students; and, on the contrary, the lower the expectations of the teacher, the lower performance of the students. This paper shows the margins of freedom that the action of the teacher has over his students, margins that allow overcoming the trajectories fixed by their social origin.

Go back to the question about how to succeed in making the children and youngsters reach all the steps of the school system, learn about other kinds of cultural assets, and, at the same time, avoid feeling ashamed about their social origin. The answer to this question is in the school, when it finds mechanisms of operation, discourse, practice, and teachers who are open not to label the students according to their social origin and, therefore, step out of the vicious circle of poverty reproduction. The school not only offered Albert Camus a getaway from the family life. At least, in the class of Mr. Bernard -this primary school teacher to whom Camus dedicated some words when he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature- the school nourished the hunger of discovering a symbolic world which, until that time, was forbidden for some families and subjects due to their social origin. The school, under certain conditions, gives a voice to the unprotected. The impossible becomes possible, and that leads to new life horizons.

Not condemning school decisions: Helping overcome The internalization of the failure categories

How to design and help build an including school? First of all, it is key to recognize that already developed about the processes of social exclusion, external to the school, having consequences in the subjectivity of the students and in the production of their educational trajectories.

The same conflict of the text is that between determinism and freedom. On the one hand, not all the institutions, nor all the teachers, take the same position before the constraints suffered by the students. While for some teachers the poverty suffered by the pupil may become a stigma -a negative aspect to be ashamed of- for some others, the material poverty of the pupils represents a challenge or a chance for the school to twist those destinies that appear to be inevitable.

Therefore, the schools sometimes represent a way of confirmation or reproduction of the external constraints that tinge the social experience of the pupils. In other cases, the school opens a new symbolic horizon that equals the different starting points that the children and youngsters have in the school system and develop their experiences and trajectories. What is that added value about, the plus that makes that for some pupils the school represents a confirmation of their social situation, and for others, given objective conditions almost identical, the school keeps being a future promise? What makes the difference among schools?

Then arise some questions or supplementary dimensions to be considered:

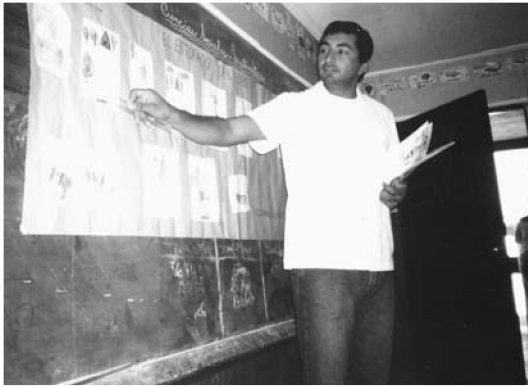
How is it that some schools see education as a possibility and others set firm over impossibility? What are the institutional conditions under which school is presented as

a second chance for students? Why certain schools allow their pupils to represent a different future, while others, in a subtle manner, advance a narrow future that confirms what is denied to the pupils due to their different social base?

It is a fact that the feeling of vulnerability in the childhood, adolescence and youth not only takes place in the poor or indigent sectors; it affects the educated and non-educated population as a whole, but in different ways. Although it is true that in the societies of today the projection towards the future is harsh for almost all its members, at school, certain pupils succeed in creating an utopist representation of the future. Facing the breaking of the trajectories, characteristic of these days that prevent thinking in the long run, the school is the institution that seeks for a different future which, at the same time, has to help achieve. Where it seems there is no future, the school has to develop one, a representation of another possible future.

In difficult contexts, the teacher bears the social responsibility of alleviate the social suffering of the pupils. He becomes a sort of social worker, without the special knowledge it requires, and without being subjectively prepared for that. In spite of that, many teachers transform these professional conditions that they did not choose into opportunities of democratization. The steps of the meditation about the practice may allow the teachers to learn how to get to know their pupils' identities; material and cultural constraints, without condemning them in advance; and, therefore, developing better pedagogical conditions to interact with them.

The genetic understanding of the pupils, the understanding of the other within his social and cultural identity demands a permanent learning process from those taking part in the daily life of the school. Knowing the pupils' different cultural assets of origin, and getting to understand them is a thoughtful and long-run task. Understanding the students means to enhance the knowledge about them, approach to them, in all their complexity, from the specific social and cultural context



that they live in, many times full of constraints due to poverty, but without condemning judgments arising out of these constraints in advance.

This way of interpreting the cultural identities of the students, that is to say, their points of view, their way of thinking and speaking to the world, implies knowing how to

put oneself in the other's shoes. There is no way of subjectively approach to the other through rejection, denying the singularity of the other person.

The challenge to the school of knowing the social and cultural conditions of the students should not lead to a *condemning and definite social and cultural diagnosis* of the students, resulting in the reproduction of their initial disadvantages. Reformulating discourses, based on phrases such as "*it is not worth teaching them too much, because they will not finish school or they will end up as laborers, same as their parents*" is one of the main challenges of the educators who teach in difficult contexts. Difficult is not impossible.

The questions that arise are: How can something which apparently is impossible be turned into a possibility? How can school failure be eradicated? How should something apparently inevitable be approached?

From the premise that the school can become a place where apparent inevitable futures can be twisted, is necessary to take into account the "lesson of Camus" since, together with the determinations that limit the trajectories of the students, there are margins of freedom to overpass those limits. In order to overpass them, it is necessary to consider those mechanisms immersed in the social and school practices and representations of the students and the teachers: the naturalization of the differences of cultural assets, the mechanisms of labelization, the ideas about the intelligence, that have an impact on the image each student has of himself, giving place to value judgments that could open or close the possibilities of educational and social experiences of a democratizing nature.

In summary, we understand that the school institution, in general, and the teacher, in particular, are key characters of the self-images that the students create, and in the senses their scholarization acquires for them. These “others” give back to the child or the young a mirror image where to see themselves (and either recognize them or reject them), which shall undoubtedly influence on the path they take in the school system.

Some questions arise:

What are the mechanisms through which the school strengthens some and weakens others?

How can the school overcome the eternal dichotomy between successful students and those who fail?

How can those subjective differences produced by students exposed to similar social constraints be identified?

Connected to the previous one: How is it possible to explain that some students show resistance against their marks of origin?

What are the challenges to the teachers before these limits undergone by their students who are marked with social exclusion?

One of the key features of the neoliberal hegemony in the field of education has been the return of alleged “scientific” arguments, which, based on the development of certain perspectives of the Biology and the Genetics, coincident with the old shapes of the biological determinism, the innate, the racism have an impact on the common sense by evidencing the creation of subjectivities.

Recent research performed in the central countries refer to the problem of the unequal appropriation of the knowledge in the societies, in terms of biological determinist arguments based on the genetic characteristics of the individuals and the nature of the intelligence. From this point of view, the social differences turn into differences among “natures”, predetermined since birth. Behind these



arguments, there are the real causes of the social inequality, favoring the explanations based on the alleged innate deficiency of the poor population – diverse.

Our theoretical conviction leads us to affirm that there is nothing about nature in the social and educational failures (although, of course, that does not neglect certain constraints and the biological determinations). They are mainly caused by an unequal distribution and appropriation of the material and symbolic resources in our societies and schools.

The school classification, by turning the differences of classes into differences of “intelligence”, makes an analog operation. The risk is that the same subjects typified as “not intelligent” create their own future. Julius Caesar said: *“At times, men own their destinies: the fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings”*.

The charismatic ideology of the gift creates, for the privileged classes, a legitimization of their cultural privileges that undergo a mutation from social heritage to individual gift or personal merit. Therefore, being disguised and euphemized, the “racism of classes” can be established without being evidenced. This alchemy results so well that, far from opposing it to another idea of school success, the popular classes assimilate, in turn, the essentialism of the upper classes, and live their disadvantages as a personal sign, ending up excluding themselves from the school system.

Today’s repetition and resurgence of the arguments of the biological determinism, as Stephen Gould states it in *La falsa medida del hombre* [*The Mismeasure of Man*] are correlated to events of political regression, especially to the campaigns to reduce the expense of the State in social programs, or, at times, to the fear of the dominant social classes whenever the disfavored groups spread some kind of social concern or even threaten to seize the government's power.

J. Murray's *The Bell Curve* had a great repercussion in the early 90s. This American sociologist, organic intellectual of the neoliberalism, proposes a theory based on the classification of the intelligence and the innate skills for the learning and the social competition

present in some racial or ethnic groups. In spite of the criticism and public claims from anthropologists, biologists, sociologists, pedagogists, psychologists, etc., his book was sold out in the first editions, and it was useful for big economic groups to withdraw their tax contributions for education and health. Based on Murray's argument "if these groups have a biological ceiling of intellectual growth: why should we continue with the contributions?"

These first concepts are the starting point to a further necessary critic and deep discussion about the biologicistic arguments, their importance in the construction of subjectivities and about a new common sense and its influence on the educational environments and the processes of scholarization within a context of a deep fragmentation and social exclusion. Therefore, set the base for the construction of alternative discourse and practices or new paradigms.

We believe that many schools will open their doors to more and more individuals suffering from daily miseries, inviting them to imagine new symbolic horizons, giving them a kind of "second chance". In fact, many institutions, against all odds, defy the "negative destinies" of those students marked with poverty constraints, which contributes to the positive reinforcement of their self-esteem and their expectations for the future. Twisting the prophecy of failure is something that the teachers, in many cases, have managed to do well. In fact, many times, it is the firm will of helping the students improve what allows the teacher to make real multiple alternatives opposed to an alleged inevitable failure expected for certain individuals and groups.

The school by itself cannot transform the structural and material life determinations that constraint the trajectories of the students, but it is prepared to give them subjective tools for their own social and school value.

The objective limits and the



subjective hopes are tensed in the democratic schools. And it is in this tension that the individual and collective educator has the biggest potential for transformation. The inevitable, then, becomes probable. There is now a chance that another destiny takes place. Therefore, other trajectories and destinies are possible. Believing in the students is a highly reliable resource.

Thinking about the possibilities that the school has so as to become a place of inclusion for everybody faces us before many challenges. Although the matter of democratization of the school is not an exclusive responsibility of the institutions, through these pages it is evidenced – and known– that many times the institutional characters use different strategies that show what to do with the daily situations they face in the classrooms. With this material, we not only try to show the many conflicts there are, but also the many opportunities that the school has to collaborate in the construction of other senses for the students, mainly aimed at including them in a world more and more complex.

To end up, we suggest to collectively go back to the first activity proposed in this work. The voice of that teacher is, for sure, the voice of many of you, and also your own experience. Could it be possible to agree on thinking that there where the outside excludes, many times the school can turn into a democratic opportunity for our children, young and adolescents?

Notes

(1) The use of terms such as subordinate, weakened or poor is aimed at evidencing the differentials of power existing among interrelated individuals and groups as regards the appropriation of material and symbolic resources.

(2) For further issues about "student condition" see: Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.C (2001): *Los estudiantes y la Cultura, Labor*, Buenos Aires.

(3) Some points developed herein have been included in Kaplan, Carina V. (2005): *Subjetividad y educación. ¿Quiénes son los adolescentes y jóvenes, hoy?* In Krichesky, Marcelo *et al.* (2005) *Adolescentes e inclusión educativa. Un derecho en cuestión*. Buenos Aires, Noveduc/EOI/UNICEF,SES.

(4) Some of these discussions can be tracked in a class of Carina Kaplan and Gabriel Brener in the virtual course coordinated by Daniel Korinfeld, PuntoSeguido, 2005.

(5) We refer to the following works:

Sennett, R. (2000): *La corrosión del carácter. Las consecuencias personales del trabajo en el nuevo capitalismo*, Anagrama, Barcelona.

Bourdieu, P. and collaborators (2000): *La miseria del mundo*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, Buenos Aires.

(6) Report: "Niñez y adolescencia en la prensa argentina", Periodismo Social, Buenos Aires, 2005.

(7) Currently leading the Proyecto PICT (17339) "*Violencias en la escuela media: sentidos, prácticas e instituciones*", in the Instituto de Investigaciones en Ciencias de la Educación, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras - UBA and funded by the Agencia Nacional de Promoción Científica y Tecnológica – SECyT – Ministerio de Educación Ciencia y Tecnología de la Nación.

(8) Norbert Elias (1897-1990) was a follower of Max Weber, professor of Sociology at the University of Leicester, born in Breslau (Poland), where he studied Medicine, Philosophy and Psychology. Among his vast work, "El proceso de la civilización" [*The Civilizing Process*] (1987), published by the Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, stands out.

(9) Kessler, Gabriel (2004) *Sociología del delito amateur*. Buenos Aires, Paidós.

(10) Erving Goffman (1922 - 1982), Canadian sociologist. Became Doctor of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Chicago in 1953. He was a professor at the University of California, Berkeley; and at the University of Pennsylvania, where he took up the chair in Anthropology and Sociology of Benjamin Franklin, until his death in 1982. Among his works, some that stand out are: “Estigma”. *La identidad deteriorada* [Stigma. Notes on the management of spoiled identity], “Internados” [Asylums], “La presentación de la persona en la vida cotidiana” [The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life]. His work can be included within the Symbolic Interactionism, since he stresses the processes of interaction in the construction of the social life. Life is a sort of drama, similar to a play, where there are a script, masks, roles and actors.

(11) Alvarez Uría, F. (1995) Escuela y subjetividad. In Cuadernos de Pedagogía, N° 203, Barcelona, Praxis.

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