### Didactics: subject matter in teachers' formation

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**ABSTRACT.** The theoretical and practical effort of professors in Didactics in the Pedagogy Course of three colleges in the state of Paraná, Brazil, is provided. By means of their trajectory construction they try to supersede a pedagogical practice that does not correspond to the real necessities in teacher's training, insisting on the possibilities of overcoming fragmentation of dominant pedagogical actions through the relationship between teaching and research.

Key words: didactics, research, teacher training.

RESUMO. Didática: uma disciplina na formação do professor. O presente artigo destaca o esforço teórico-prático de professores de Didática do Curso de Pedagogia de três instituições de ensino superior do Paraná, que buscam, através da construção de suas trajetórias, transcender uma prática pedagógica que não responde mais às atuais necessidades de formação do professor. Aponta, ainda, as possibilidades de superação da fragmentação do fazer pedagógico dominante pela relação ensino- pesquisa.

Palavras-chave: didática, formação do professor, pesquisa.

## The process of the theoretical and practical constitution of Didactics

Academic production is neither attained spontaneously nor linearly. Research, or rather the search for understanding, comprehension and interpretation, is the feedback of the researcher's perplexity in his/her work. He/She faces a phenomenon that cannot be immediately understood. Looking for the meaning of "things" is proper to the human being in the world urged by his very existence.

The concern of the present author with regard to the understanding of the meaning of didactics as an obligatory discipline in teachers' training began to take shape in 1986 when she had to read this discipline as a professor in Pedagogy at the State University of Maringá<sup>1</sup>, in the state of Paraná, Brazil<sup>2</sup>.

At that time the academy<sup>3</sup> emphatically denied Didactics within a technicist view. One may deny

something if that something has existed in a concrete form. Actually the problem boiled down to a "technicist antipedagogy" stance. If from a technicist point of view the existence of Didactics was validated on the political and educational plane as well as on the political and pedagogical one for a long period of time. This happened because it led to real values. That is the reason why I had to analyze established discourses that would indicate the strategy leading towards the comprehension of what already existed for the development of a fragmented pedagogical practice.

As a teacher I had a long way to go in search of home. I mean, entering within Didactics, remaining within it to understand its meaning in thoughtful pedagogical practice, as an unconditional possibility, for its construction.

As my point of reference I assumed my training in Pedagogy, together with primary and secondary readings I had undertaken so that I would appropriate everything that I could possibly understand.

At first I tried to understand Didactics's trajectory and what I considered *significant* for education and which I experienced in my undergraduate course in the 70s. I am taking into

The State University of Maringá, maintained by the state government, comprises undergraduate and graduate courses.

The state of Paraná together with the states of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul, lie in southern Brazil

In this research work Academy means the divergent and convergent thought of educators that may produce new ideas and practices by means of seminars, meetings and publications.

account that, within this short period, at a given moment in Brazilian history, the model of a New Pedagogy and of a Technicist Pedagogy subscribed the intentions of an educational policy based on an educational tendency.

Further, I retook the academy's discourse so that my questionings would be made clearer. I began asking some questions: what was the premise when one denied a technicist view of Didactics? Where did the controversial stance of some educators come from? How did they negate the discipline when denying the technicist view?

It was meaningless to accept the arguments of those who had already denied them. Therefore, I had to look for a new concept and to immerge myself for the sake of my own understanding.

In my readings I observed that some Brazilian educators had already literally appropriated critical reproductivist theories, such as those by Althusser (n/d), Baudelot and Estabet (1971), Bourdieu and Passeron (1975). At that moment language usage was common to all professors. They marveled at the denunciation that the school was only reproducing values considered worthwhile by society. Thus the unveiling and demystification discourse emerged. Education was open to the new *ideology* that arose as a counterideology.

Denying the technicism that dominated teachers' actions, or rather, the extremes to which the technical character of Didactics was involved, Didactics began to overestimate the political dimension. Pedagogical practice had to be changed. The established factors were criticized and the teacher adopted the stance of a critical revealer of reality. It was again an attempt to affirm the new while suffocating the old actually, without any distancing from the old. The contents of technicist Didactics continued to be developed through a new discourse. I detected that in some practices the professor of Didactics was confused since the new has still not been felt as home (Heidegger, 1958). It was only being reproduced in a discourse made by another and validating what was expressed by the academy.

However, the denied technical dimension of Didactics is again incorporated to Didactics as an important aspect in teacher training. It was then thought that Didactics could be developed within a multidimensional view involving the technical, political and human dimensions. At the beginning I also observed that when the *multidimensional view* is sought after, within totality, it begins to be segmented in the thought and in the acts of the

teacher of Didactics in his/her political and pedagogical activity (the classroom).

Since the 1982 seminar *Didactics under analysis*<sup>4</sup>, other seminars and meetings were organized by the academy and by professors throughout Brazil. Specific research work was undertaken and studies on certain themes published. Many ideas were discussed as a result of the maturing of a great number of educators (who lived under the military regime). The latter reorganized themselves with a new pedagogical stance, or rather, the critical perspective of education: Historical and Critical Pedagogy.

After observing the multiple forms of looking at the same area of knowledge (Didactics) and after studying thought development of the academy, I felt it necessary to understand how a professor of Didactics, in his/her daily work in the classroom, within the university system of the state of Paraná thinks, feels and lives the discipline Didactics throughout his/her professional exercise. I sought the historicized thought of these educators so that the experience of Didactics could be revealed and expressed.

In your life experience what is the meaning of Didactics as given by the professor of Didactics? By means of this question<sup>5</sup>, taken as an essential instrument for the development of this study, I tried to understand how a professor of Didactics has felt at home and built his/her trajectory. Further, what meaning has this discipline given to him/her.

To this end I took the discourses of six professors of Didactics of three colleges in the state of Paraná<sup>6</sup>. Their ideas were obtained by the *Qualitative Analysis of Situated Phenomenon* (Martins and Bicudo, 1989).

Initially research modality puts into context the phenomenon under analysis. This means that a phenomenon exists if a subject is present. That's why the researcher is interested in the subject who experiences and lives consciously the phenomenon.

Within the Qualitative Analysis of Situated Phenomenon I made use of the Ideographic Analysis

The seminar originated within the V Annual Meeting of the National Association for Post-Graduation and research in Education (Anped). A study group called Group for Didactic Methodology was formed. Seminar was organized between 16-19 November 1982 by the Department of Education of the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro with the help of the National research Council (CNPq)

Question means to take a meditative look at the very thing which lies before us to be experienced

Interviews were made with professors from the State University of Maringá, State University of Londrina and State University of Ponta Grossa. With the exception of one professor, all had a Master's degree at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (4) and at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (1).

for the understanding of the discourses of the professors of Didactics. It is an analysis of ideas that pervade the subject's naive description, spontaneously and naturally given, without any type of interpretation, and which must be made visible. The intelligibility of the phenomenon was produced by the revelation of ideas articulated and expressed in the discourse. Thus, the meaningful ideas posited could be reached.

Interpretation was the next step. It occurred after the researcher had reached the phenomenon of his/her interest and had undertaken his/her cognitive and affective immersion. Immersion points towards the provoking questions for the study s/he is developing. I then used the *synthesis* method and composed in their totality the *significant ideas* that emerged from the ideographic analysis of each discourse.

Within the interpretation issue the significant and provoking ideas of six interviews were thematized. They were a great help in my own trajectory and in that presented by the area's intellectual production, updated by the theoretical advances of the 90s. In its final stage research concentrated on how the professor of Didactics in his/her trajectory gave a meaning to Didactics within his/her task as teacher by discussing this meaning from my present *situation* experience.

Verbatim or literally transcribed discourses of my colleagues in Didactics are long and resourceful. After an extensive analysis a synthesis of the principal ideas of each lived experience was given. Provoking questions arose and this fact caused the development of the study<sup>7</sup>.

Detailed study of each interview demonstrated the professional life of the professors in three large movements. The meaning of Didactics emerged and revealed itself by how these movements were lived, experienced, studied and built by the interviewed persons.

I first sought a set of propositions that would bring forth, within the historical reference of each pedagogical discourse, the initial acts of each subject through his/her training, his/her professional exercise, especially in Didactics. A reproduction trajectory could be observed, that is, his/her repetition of a standing practice or of pedagogical notions of his/her own training.

Second, I found the emergence of a new meaning of Didactics in the main ideas of the interviewed. It consisted of a search towards another

Parts of this analysis were published in Cadernos de Metodologia e Técnica de Pesquisa, n.6, 1995 with the title Um diálogo com a Didática, seus docentes e sua produção, p. 53-76. positioning. The movement consisted of great intellectual effervescence. In this intermediate experience, sets of propositions could be grouped showing moments of anguish experienced in the teaching profession, in searching for literature and in postgraduate training. Trajectory demonstrated a new act and a new referential, albeit teeming with influences of the model previously lived, and suffering the contradiction of continuity-rupture.

Finally, a type of pedagogical practice was revealed in the interviews. It was experienced by the professors at the precise moment they were speaking of their experiences in Didactics, while seeking to break away from the old model and suggesting a new pedagogical paradigm. Positioning myself within this movement, I shall reflect on the above experience.

# The teacher of Didactics: between old and new paradigms

The interviews of six female professors of Didactics point towards a period experienced by many university professors in the history of Brazilian education. Although there have been many scientific advances in Didactics, one may perceive that the pedagogical model of the 60s and 70s is still standing. Its values are still present and enhance, with a certain homesickness, a type of practice destined to become extinct, but which is still extant in the university milieu. This occurs when we hear undergraduates reveal their expectations with regard to the discipline within the technicist view. In these interviews I shall discuss the trajectory of Didactics while enhancing certain moments in its production.

I believe that in the long path of production, reproduction, deconstruction and reconstruction of Didactics, the pedagogical resistance is being disrupted by the same movement in which teachers are inserted: the trajectory should be continued, remade by new studies, by new referentials, by new research work, in short, by a new perception of this area of knowledge.

The teacher who denies the didactic movement in her area of knowledge and in her discipline denies the possibility of *continuum*, conquest, appropriation, reading of and on the world, the encounter with contradictions present in social reality within which we act, interact, produce and are produced.

At what precise moment enhancement of the transcendence of the interviewed by the new vision, borne by a never ending search for knowledge, is possible? All the interviews are pervaded by this question.

It seemed to me from the interviews that the silence covertly agreed upon for more than a decade had its first disruptures. This occurs from the moment the teacher perceives the possibilities of a new activity brought initially by the educational and pioneering ideas of Paulo Freire and by the critical-reproductivist theories. Let us have a look at the following interviews.

In the mid-70s you already have a more critical literature on education. However, one couldn't access that literature. It was criticism for criticism's sake. What could one do? One had to be a technicist. With all criticism, as if technicism which others practiced was not well done, that which we suggested, yes, since it was based on sound theory. (Interview 3)

One was dissatisfied with the new ideas on Didactics when publications were brought to light in the 70s. (Interview 4)

Then I was really dissatisfied with my work. I thought that what I did was in fact aimless. So, I was influenced by publications on reproductiveness and that confused me or made me think differently without knowing the true solution, what solution to give to these things. (Interview 5)

The theories referred to by the teachers denounced dominant official pedagogy (1975-1978), even though they were later criticized because they didn't provide any new suggestions and remained merely at the critical and fighting level. Nevertheless, they were a landmark in the history of Brazilian education and especially for Didactics.

The 80s, a pioneer decade in the revitalization of Didactics, left its marks of enthusiasm or in the acceptance of the ideas and suggestions proposed in seminars, meetings and conferences in the teachers' practice. However, the danger of crystallization of these marks pervaded the knowledge-acts of the teacher of Didactics at the moment the first ideas were disseminated and applied without the necessary comprehension on the meaning of the new referential. This may be observed in the following interview:

In the mid-80s some teachers defended the idea that education did not merely reproduce reality; as a form of non-reproduction, they were capable of teaching all students without any distinction. Later they were convinced that this was not possible. (Interview 3)

Appropriation of *the already* is a human characteristic until the advent of a more critical reflection. At this moment the teacher seeks *the already*. Thus, a conflict rises with the referential that has been given to him/her.

Such contradictions were more evident in the classroom since theory alone is incapable of transforming anything. Theory must be one with practice and vice versa. Theoretical activity makes possible the transformation of our awareness of facts, of our ideas on things, on the world we live in, but not on the very things. Practical activity puts into practice an effective act on the world and may lead to real transformation. Castro (1991:23) states that "Didactics must live with this double aspect, theory and practice ... It is a very special practice because of the social responsibility it involves, since it has deep social impregnation".

It may be observed that the teaching of Didactics retook its meaning and value when the discipline was taken out of its "isolation" and began to be asked for by the very teachers who taught it or who were peculiarly interested in it in class room practice. The following evidence is very important:

When I was taking my Master's degree I used to read a lot and sent all literature to my colleagues [at the university]. When we met we used to discuss and talk about what was happening, from our point of view and according to our perception. After taking the degree we decided to change the type of Didactics given and all followed the new incentive. We began to write the texts. We were of the opinion that we had to write the literature we needed; we couldn't merely rely on what other authors wrote. (Interview 5)

When the teachers positioned themselves in a comprehensive and not in a conflicting attitude, the experienced reality was revealed. Challenges abounded and at present the discipline seeks its way of being, in a situated form, as an area of knowledge that must be thoroughly explored.

In their immersion teachers perceived the vast field that had to be explored so that Didactics could continue to be fundamental in teacher training. In the process towards its constitution, some professors do not have a very clear idea about Didactics's new model. It is the price paid when searching for depth, in the process of building. With more clarity other teachers direct themselves towards theoretical and practical depth in the discipline, placing it in the context of contemporary society.

At this point I perceive that many professors of Didactics are struggling to overcome the dominant modern paradigm which installed itself since the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and to establish themselves in the understanding of emergent post-modern paradigm (Santos, 1988; 1996), born in a critical and chaotic situation and experienced by us in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

One should emphasize that in their life histories professors of Didactics received a certain training

and lived sometime within the remaining trends of the dominant paradigm of positivism. However, the anguish, the feeling of incompetence, the search and the commitments in their teaching furnish elements that build the discipline of Didactics within *a new view*, reformulating and giving substance to a new position while instigated by contradictions that emerge from social practice.

The interviewed teachers who try to build a new Didactics establish

their own emergent, post-modern and, at the same time, scientific and social paradigms. They try not to work with traditional dichotomies that are characteristic of the dominant paradigm. They open paths, experiment, rehearse and dare. They suffer in their life and in their existential condition the repercussion of science's epistemological condition: they change their concept of life, of the human being, of society, of knowledge and of teaching. They have no more certainties, but they seek the coherence of discovered truths in their praxis. (Pimentel, 1993:34)

For the interviewed teachers, it has been a new life model. There is a definite struggle against dichotomies: subject and object, theory and practice, knowledge and reality. Such dichotomies are acknowledged as questions that provoked them and still provoke in their life.

The professors clearly recognize that they must overcome lived fragmentation. Moreover, they are decided to develop Didactics through their own contents, methodology, in an articulated way, sometimes with uncertainties, but always seeking the construction of a situated, historicized and present knowledge.

# Between old and new paradigms: the necessity of a new articulation for the Pedagogy course

In their new view of the totality they are looking for, the interviewed professors go beyond the discipline of Didactics, their professional area, and indicate the fragmentation of the Pedagogy Course through its different disciplines and its professors. Each and every one feels that he/she is solely responsible for his/her specific field and is reluctant to keep in mind the course's deepest meaning. Let us see how the interviews focus on this question:

The course of Didactics I systematizes all the scattered information from previous disciplines and, at the same time, makes clear the meaning of education. Thus [teachers] will better systematize their practice as educators (...) Now, in the course of Didactics we are at crossroads. The students have such a confused idea of the problem and it takes so much time to establish

itself that this specific problem is not assimilated, since there is not much time for it. I think that the course of Didactics would have to analyze clearly all this. Each professor deals with specific problems without any concern as to the verification whether the students are really assimilating the chief problems. (Interview 3)

The above teacher considers this suggestion in Didactics really provocative since she clearly acknowledges that it is indispensable and challenging to train the educator so that she might read historically the education practice. Thus, she may understand reality, namely, the problem of the professor's alienation and the meaning of the official discourse.

So that the above may occur, it is important that the didactical and methodological aspects of the Course of Pedagogy may be evaluated and revised. This happens because each professor develops his/her specific subject matter without relating the general to the specific and the specific to the general. Didactics alone tries to unite the history of capitalist society with that of education. It would also insist on its own specificity, or rather, the teachers' practice in the classroom, without dealing with it deeply because of lack of time. Didactics emphasizes that it is the pedagogical task of each professor to study the above with the student. Thus one may not remain merely within a presumed critical discourse, but understand reality and know how to understand oneself as a teacher.

Interviewed professor 4 manifested herself thus on this problem:

This year we are not satisfied with the model of Didactics. We are very slow in constructing the context until we reach Didactics proper. This year we again reformulated and tried to diminish the context somewhat. Even though one may say that Pedagogy is ready, we feel that it doesn't come out since the students have a very fragmented knowledge. Philosophies do not agree with one another; Sociologies neither; History of Education is not concerned with Brazilian Education. The discipline Teaching Structure is still intimately linked to the legal problem and is not influenced by the political one. (Interview 4)

She considers that Didactics's contextualized development implies a series of discoveries. The Course of Pedagogy will begin to be seen in its totality when one considers that all disciplines are responsible for the student's education. When each discipline is solely concerned with its own niche and with its specific contents it loses sight of the entire Course of Pedagogy and transmits a fragmented vision of knowledge. The vision that professors of other areas have reduces Didactics to a mere

technical conduction of teaching, making it responsible for the teachers' deficient training. On the other hand, one has perceived that, within the present model of the discipline, the students have already superseded the exclusive limits of technicism for technicism's sake, of the diminished vision, of the unique and ready model.

The interviewed professors are aware that the present problems do not appear in an isolated way. They are not specific to any one group and to any one region. They are interlinked and interdependent.

They are aware that they have to live with those that couldn't overcome the mechanicist idea and who, in their practice, still establish the fragmented vision of knowledge in rigidly closed compartments, while reinforcing a divorced and unarticulated practice of social reality. Interviewed professor 5 states that

professors of the disciplines of Teaching Practice and Monitored Training interfere with Didactics and are always insisting on the technical aspect of instrumentalization. (Interview 5)

These professors are experiencing their own rediscovery as subjects of history, at present written and read in our area. They see themselves as *bridges*, albeit alone, and try to interrelate the various regions of knowledge and their interdependence. The following interview stretch makes this clear:

Students should know history, the movement of capitalist society and, at the same time, recover the lost subject matter, so that they can reflect on the contents that would have to serve as man's function. (Interview 2)

If I do not always manage to link the specific with the general, the student is in no better position. He remains with the critical discourse. (Interview 3)

One may perceive a great concern on the professors' part for the position of other professors who think of the Course of Pedagogy in a fragmented form. These hinder the development of the comprehension of totality, a discourse deeply rooted in the academy.

In spite of these challenges they consider that the new model improved significantly the development of Didactics. In fact it has been worked up in a broader form, aiming at competent training of the student as a future teacher. In academic terms, this means a theoretical basis, the specific knowledge of the discipline, technical instrumentalization, regular readings and the insertion of the experience of the student who already works within this type of training.

However, these extremely complex problems are being studied and considered within the discipline and the development of teaching. Such a situation must be broadened, revised and revisited through research, which will corroborate with teaching proper as one of the areas of practice of university professors.

### Necessities of the discipline Didactics: some considerations

The 90s, at the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, show us the possibilities of Didactics through the potentialization of challenges emerging from an indispensable dimension for all areas of knowledge: research.

The moment has been experienced in a more concrete and objective way since the 80s. It occurred through research work within this area of knowledge, even though, at first, it had to be submitted to the requirements of post-graduate courses.

The importance of research consists in its superseding the boundaries of Master's theses and Doctor's dissertations, transforming the latter into reference works and state-of-art books. They will thus be available to teachers who are geographically distant from the great urban centers.

On the other hand, it is not sufficient that professors of Didactics read research works and update themselves on what happens in the academy as a world of knowledge production different from the world of the class room.

According to Cappelletti (1992:13), when one thinks of teaching at university level, one cannot:

fail to emphasize the fundamental importance of research in the construction of the teaching role. The teacher must be able to produce his/her own knowledge so that s/he may teach the student the most basic trait of a university, namely, scientific production.

Otherwise, science would be transformed into mere teaching contents.

The teacher should always keep in mind man's life within society, the world of work and social relationships, besides the specific role of Didactics for the training of the future teacher.

Systemized study in Didactics has been strengthened owing to the concern of many educators. Large steps in development have been taken. Many educators have devoted their time to publishing their studies with a very important aim in mind: to contribute towards education and,

particularly, towards Didactics, seeking its contemporary meaning.

Cunha (1993:99) shows her commitment when she makes herself available for the community. She says:

the effort I make to analyze the theme has one aim: contributing towards the definition of Didactics's objective. Thus, I may favor a more competent and adequate practice for the teaching of this discipline that would consequently raise the quality level of Brazilian education.

A true perspective exists. There is another very important perspective for the Didactics professor. Through the development of research in his/her area, in his/her daily world of thought and experience, in his/her personal investigation, the professor will understand the education process and, perhaps, understand that the Pedagogy Course, as any other course, has differentiated professorships produced by each one's academic training.

One may verify this statement materially. It is sufficient to examine recent publications of renowned researchers in our area to perceive great strides in research. In the evolution background, teaching is being revealed.

Research consists of studies that give importance to the class room (Oliveira, 1993) as Didactics's study object, as an expression of the teaching phenomenon, within the dialectic-materialist trend; the school daily work (André, 1993; 1995) as a possibility for the construction of didactic knowledge within the ethnographic research; the building of didactic knowledge (Silva, 1993) with research-activity; the construction of didactics (Veiga, 1993) towards the democratization of the education process in its historical and critical perspective; the classroom as a space for knowledge, culture (Penin, 1994); interdisciplinary practices in the classroom (Fazenda, 1998).

Publication of another work by Oliveira (1992) is highlighted because it offers theoretical and methodological elements for the construction of Didactics within a dialectic and materialist point of view. This work was initially written as a requirement for a public examination for Full Professorship at the Education Faculty of the Federal University of Minas Gerais in 1991. The author reflects on Didactics and its study object, namely, teaching, within a historical, ideological, epistemological and anthropological approach, aiming at provoking reflections for the effective construction of Didactics.

During the 90s we have seen many publications in this area. We have also perceived that the educator

is concerned with participating in the great events of education, such as Endipe<sup>8</sup>, Anped, Cedes and Ande meetings<sup>9</sup>. Needless to say, there are also events in the state<sup>10</sup> in which the educator exercises his/her profession and where he/she may present papers in the area of Didactics in a very significant way. Some research work shows an academic stance and a critical awareness based on referentials for his/her knowledge-activity. Albeit with great difficulties, others seek their own proper ways in teaching. However, the quality factor of the interviews is in the possibility of positing themselves, revealing themselves with regard to the activity they develop for the building of Didactics as a discipline and as an area of knowledge for teacher training.

From the time the interviews were taken up to the present the interviewed professors have already walked another stretch, similar to that I have undertaken in this chronological instance, in a continuous trajectory of construction and reconstruction.

Reality points to an undisputed logic: one cannot give up Didactics, since

the condemnation of Didactics because of its unsatisfactory content doesn't solve our practical problems. It would be like condemning Medicine because it hasn't yet found the cure for the common cold. If contents are undefined it seems to be more logical to seek the fundamental kernel of Didactics than to seek its boundaries in a time where interdisciplinarity is not only acceptable but ardently sought after (Castro, 1991:22).

Within this perspective, the trajectory of Didactics is thus open. The doctrinal and prescriptive corpus of a science is not built in one or two decades. One may remind oneself of the long trajectory experienced by Physics and Mathematics. Today they are developed sciences with well-built bases.

While not definitive, Didactics is still to be defined. It always exists in a continuous *being*, with new possibilities within the context of teacher training. The trajectory of its building still continues.

In 1978 two important organisations were established: The National Association of Post-graduate (afterwards, Research) in Education - Anped and the Study Center of Education and Society (Cedes). In 1979 the National Association of Education (Ande) was established too. As from 1980 the three organisations promoted the Brazilian Conferences of Education (CBE) hailing from the former National Conferences of

Examples are the Research Seminars in Education of many regions in Brazil.

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