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**Centrality of Internship in Teacher Training:
Insights of Interns on Their Learning**

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Abstract

This text aims at analyzing the importance of internship for teacher training undergraduate courses (*licenciatura*)¹, with emphasis on that which is a requirement in Didactics, in teacher training. Understood as a privileged moment in the training of future teachers, such internship provides an approach to school (teachers' work environment), to didactic and pedagogical practices (when teachers and students establish a relationship with knowledge through collective actions), and to teachers and students (drawing near to understandings and attitudes of those involved in class).

Considering that the specific realm of teacher training is based on the pedagogical and didactic understandings of the act of teaching and learning, the discussion on internship will be contextualized in the midst of theoretical considerations of what we mean by Education, Pedagogy and Didactics. In addition, the internship potential as a training environment will be analyzed based on the speech of undergraduates.

Keywords: teacher training, internship, didactics

¹ Under Brazilian law, *licenciatura* aims at training and qualifying teachers to work in basic education schools, teaching children and adolescents aged between 3 and 17 in primary and secondary education.

Introduction - On Education, Pedagogy and Didactics

Education is a human exclusive activity and occurs among humans, for a simultaneous and dual purpose, as it introduces new humans in the already existing society and builds them in their subjectivity. **Pedagogy** is the science that studies the educational praxis in order to equip individuals, education professionals, among them teachers, to promote the conditions for a humanizing education. Its object of study is human education in its various forms as it appears in social practice. Thus, education is deemed as a process of formation of human qualities, while teaching, the object of **Didactics**, is the process of organizing and facilitating learning activity in specific contexts for such purposes.

Didactics as a subject in teacher training undergraduate courses arises as a possibility to contribute so that teaching, core of teachers' work, results in the much needed learning for subject formation, into relationships, prepared to be critically inserted in society, with a view to transform conditions that lead to de-humanization. It does so by bringing theoretical contributions of its own to the analysis, understanding, interpretation of contextualized teaching, in a process of reality research, aimed at pointing out overcoming opportunities.

Centrality of Internship in Teacher Training – The Case of Didactics as a Subject

It is within the context of Didactics, as a subject in undergraduate courses, that we determine the completion of 20 hours of internship². For this purpose, undergraduates *i)* define, initially, the themes that will guide their school observation, activity which is collectively discussed and individually oriented, up to the development of a proposal that expresses, as narrowly defined as possible, the focus of interest of the intern; *ii)* go to the schools they have chosen; *iii)* make the prior planned observations, conduct interviews, read consistently with the chosen theme and systematize the results in an analytical report; *iv)* are grouped by themes to present results in the classroom through poster, sharing remarks and questions for group discussion.

We understand internships as a field of knowledge involving studies, analysis, questioning, reflection and proposing solutions for teaching and learning, comprising a reflection on the pedagogical practices, teaching work and instructional practices, in social, historical and cultural contexts. Accordingly, it is defined as mediation between teacher trainers, undergraduate students and school teachers. In its completion, these subjects remain aware of

² The *Teacher Training Program* in force at USP was designed in 2004 and had its implementation initiated in 2006. It establishes the fulfillment of 400 hours of internship, of which 100 hours in the Institutes or Departments of specific training and 300 hours in the Faculty of Education, these distributed as follows: 240 hours of Teaching Methodology I and II; 20hs of Psychology; 20hs of Educational Policy and Organization of Basic Education; 20 hours of Didactics.

the connections and relationships that are established and from which they will be able to perform pedagogical dialogues and realize the possibilities in conducting research among them, having school issues as phenomena to be analyzed, understood and even overcome.

The internship then arises as a moment, an environment that favors understanding about the teaching profession, which, according to Sacristán (1991:64), may be understood as "a statement of what is specific in teaching activities, i.e., the set of behaviors, knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that constitute the specificity of being a teacher." The intern approaches the teacher in action, who sustains his/her performance through a process of construction/reconstruction of practical answers (professional knowledge) in the face of issues that arise in the classroom, at school, in the relationship with other professionals, parents, society, and that lead to the re-configuration of being a teacher and being in the profession. These aspects, directly related to how teachers perform their work, assist interns in formulating their representations about what it means to see themselves as future teachers, to the extent that such aspects favor the extension of the students' conceptual understandings and on how to teach and learn.

The starting point for an incursion into the school environment is the development of a guiding proposition for the research to be performed. Having a question-issue is critical to direct the undergraduates' focus when they arrive at a given school and, particularly, at the classroom, since these are complex, challenging and often troubled environments, making it difficult to approach the students, who have to deal with contexts that are "strange" to them. This is because they enter school at this time as future teachers in training and need to develop the ability to observe aspects that bear no resemblance to them nor aroused their interest when they were students. To get to the question-issue it is essential to start from undergraduates' restlessness or curiosity, which then demands guidance from the Didactics professor and readings capable of adding theoretical elements to their initial field of interest. This moment consists of several back and forth movements until reaching the desired point in the formulation, described in the following report of an undergraduate:

"As the original proposal for internship development, I chose to work with the field of teacher / student relations, an idea then improved in discussions with the professor of Didactics. I swore to observing in an 8th grade classroom the relationships between the teachers and those students often stereotyped as 'top' and 'bottom' of the class. My idea was to see how relationships between teachers and already 'labeled' students were established in a classroom." (Literature Undergraduate)

With the question-issue, in their Didactics internship, many undergraduates will have their first contact with the school where they will observe, with investigative attitude, what teachers do and what they think about what they do, how they interact with the complexity and the dynamics of the classroom, how they live the profession in the contemporary school environment, defining and

reformulating their way of teaching, how they live their fears and express their opinions about what brings them pleasure or suffering at work. They will listen to speeches, observe behavior and seek to expose slightly more of the profession they are about to embrace.

“Although I have already worked with a school (firstly in a preparatory course for university entrance exams aimed at low-income students and then a preparatory course for upper social classes), I still had not been faced with the reality of public education in the city of São Paulo, which, on the one hand, rather saddened me and, on the other, also made me think more deeply about the teacher profession today.” (Literature Undergraduate)

Given these considerations, it is legitimate to ask, can you perform such Didactic internships in the form of research? Albeit to a short period, research in an internship is a strategy, a method, a possibility of training the intern as a future teacher and future researcher in the field. Within the subject of Didactics, this strategy has proven capable of promoting research skills and the understanding of its relevance when committed to teaching with a view to transform. Our intention is to give undergraduate students elements favoring the development of a questioning attitude, worried about denaturing the phenomena that occur in the classroom.

“With the reflections on the situations experienced during the internship and the help of the suggested readings, as well as the discussions on classroom practices held in Didactics, I realized that the classes are not simply to be taught. It is not about a form of knowledge transmission, as it may seem when we observe attempts of approaching education as a storehouse of information. As well stated by Freire³, it is a human relationship, with multiple and varied sizes and complexities.” (Social Sciences Undergraduate)

Research as methodological means of internship development arises as means of training for future teachers and translates into, on the one hand, mobilizing research that allows the expansion and analysis of the contexts in which the internship has taken place. Also, on the other hand, into the possibility of the interns developing research attitude and skills from internship experiences, developing projects that enable them to both understand and discuss the situations they observe. It also helps the intern comprehend the importance of transposing learnings stalled within the limits of the various course subjects, linking them to the students’ interests and needs, which is essential for building true and meaningful pedagogical practices.

The internship, thus, requires a different attitude towards knowledge, regarding it then not as truth able to explain any and every situation observed. It

³ Freire, P. “Papel da educação na humanização”. In: *Uma Educação para a liberdade*. Porto: Textos Marginais, 1974, p. 7-21. Available at <<http://www.projetomemoria.art.br/PauloFreire/obras/artigos/6.html>>.

demands new knowledge be sought from the relationship between prior explanations and new data that reality imposes, gathered through investigative approach (cf. Pimenta & Lima, 2004; Lima, 2001). An undergraduate student offers an interesting insight on this moment of discovery and questioning of both reality and convictions:

"In the context of my observation, focused on how the teacher gets the attention of the class, I realized that this was a "non-issue". According to what I have observed, teachers were not worried about getting students' attention. Based on discussions with some of them, the thesis is that "whoever pays attention". (...) They argue that with automatic approval, students no longer have a reason to pay attention to the subjects." (Social Sciences Undergraduate)

The internship as praxis reflection enables Didactics undergraduates to learn from those who already have experience in teaching activity and understand the complexity of institutional practices. However, discussing such experiences, their possibilities, reasons for success or failure, establishes a step forward from mere observation. Mediation of the specific contents of Didactics, the available literature and authors, the strategies used in class, movies, class discussions, written records the individual comprehension of the readings, collective production, the professors' attitude before them, theories, discussion of articles and daily news on topics of education, school, school systems, educational policies, all of which play an important role in this process. Undergraduates grasp such confluence of efforts and subsidies, thus evaluating as follows:

"Working as an intern was important precisely to raise awareness of the difficult yet deliciously challenging task of being a teacher in an unstable environment like this: the teacher is but one of the members of society, and their role may be fulfilled in order to bring students to a moment of reflection where they can stop to think about what they are doing and the world they are part of. (...) Schools are a mirror of many aspects of today's world and the country we have. All our contradictions, biases, hopes and problems lie there only with new garments ..." (History Undergraduate)

The questioning attitude towards the duties of teachers involves questioning and taking a stand in the face of a wide variety of roles, such as teaching, guiding the study, individually helping students, mediating relations, preparing materials, knowing how to assess, organizing spaces and activities, etc. (Sacristán, 1993: 77). It is then, with the support of both theoretical knowledge and knowledge produced through the practice in question, that the future teachers achieve better personal understandings, build their knowledge and the ethical and professional commitment. The internship then consists of a triggering moment for observation, questioning, investigating, reading, analyzing and new formulation of knowledge essential to teaching performance.

"The reality I have observed is, I believe, essential to my training. Why? Because this reality is my reality. For this reason, I have been there (at the school). Observing and, from it, seeking to be inserting in this context that I expect to be my context. With mistakes, I know. They are inevitable and necessary for my training. And with success. These observations represent much more than watching some classes and comparing with what I would do or fail to do. It means that learning is mine, and that training is also mine. But as a result of continuous learning." (Social Sciences Undergraduate)

One of the first impacts is the shock when faced with the real condition of the schools and the contradictions between literature and experience (Almeida, 2008), the official propaganda and what actually happens.

In their internship reports, the first revelation of many undergraduates relates to panic, disorientation and helplessness when in contact with the school environment. At the beginning of the activities and upon arrival at the school, as one of the interns has reported, many are the problems related to lack of organization, materials, resources, integration between school and interns, as well as indiscipline, violence, among many others:

"When I arrived at school, I could not analyze what I observed. It was a public school and I had never experienced a situation like that. They were short on school lunch! In the middle of that drive, I felt a mixture of panic and incompetence, apart from finding myself completely lost. I wanted to rush out of that place. The following day, I was sick at the time of the internship." (Licenciatura Undergraduate)

The changes resulting from educational reforms generally bring as a consequence insecurity among teachers as they alter organizational forms, with a view to improving education, without, however, altering working conditions, which may give cause to apathy and demotivation from those facing the challenges raised to them in the school routine (Codo, 1999).

The intern will be in contact with many dissatisfied teachers, worn by the lives they lead and the work they do, by the loss of historically achieved rights, apart from the economic and social issues that affect them. Thus, interns are commonly met at schools with appeals such as *Give up while you can! What are you doing here, so young?*

Conclusion

Our theoretical starting point is regarding the internship as means of favoring an approach of undergraduate students to their future professional environment. In this movement, it allows them to collect data, observe the practice of experienced professionals, reflect, analyze, conceptualize and seek to combine studied theories with practical situations in order to articulate the

various elements gathered in the observed reality and move forward in their personal development and in the building of their teaching style.

Based on the reviews that our *licenciatura* students make on their learning arising from the internships, and considering the challenges and difficulties faced, we have synthesized some results of the experienced processes: the opportunity to have contact with the real situation of public schools; understanding the relationship between theory, school practices and the work of its professionals; seizing the lives of teachers, the profession in their lives and their classroom practices; identifying habits, attitudes and daily lives of teachers, their relationships with their peers, with their students, with internship supervisors, the school community; realizing the distance between government discourse and marketing on public schools and their reality; clear consciousness that the internship will give support to teaching practice, especially for those who have never been in the classroom; observing differences in the behavior of children, adolescents and adults; the stimuli they receive and how they are treated by parents, school and teachers; the opportunity to meet teachers actually doing outstanding work in public schools and the access to activities never seen during the course; realizing that putting much of the accumulated expertise into practice is possible; experiencing work sharing, team spirit growing among colleagues in training activities; understanding of the elements that interfere decisively in the classroom management and in the lives of teaching professionals. Finally, the internship proved to be an environment for deconstructing myths and prejudices and for building possibilities for the work of future teachers.

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