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Teacher and difference: among experiences, ruptures, and encounters

Maestro y Diferencia: Entre experiencias, rupturas y Encuentros

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RESUMEN

Palabras Clave:

maestro; educación; pedagogía diferencial; Asperger

El artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación que tuvo como objetivo analizar las interacciones entre el maestro-intercesor y un estudiante diagnosticado con Asperger. El enfoque es cualitativo, a través de un estudio de caso. Se desarrollaron tres momentos metodológicos: el preparatorio, comprendió la construcción de los fundamentos teóricos de las categorías asperger, maestro y las interrelaciones en el contexto escolar; el reconocimiento del caso, se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas a docentes clave en la formación del estudiante y se aplicó entrevista a profundidad a una de las docentes creadoras de la institución educativa en la que se desarrollan las interacciones, autodenominada como posibilidad educativa para la diferencia; finalmente, se sistematizó y analizó la información mediante el software para el tratamiento de datos cualitativos Atlas.ti. Los resultados evidenciaron que el rol del maestro-intercesor se da por medio de la experiencia, la diferencia y la crisis.

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

teacher; education; differential pedagogy; Asperger

The article presents the results of the research that aimed to analyze the role of the teacher in the interaction with a student diagnosed with Asperger's. The approach is qualitative, through a case study. The study gave rise to three methodological moments: the preparatory one, included the construction of the theoretical foundations of the categories such as perger, teacher and the interrelations in the school context; the recognition of the case, semi-structured interviews were carried out with key teachers in the student's training and an in-depth interview was applied to one of the creative teachers of the educational institution in which the interactions are developed, self-described as an educational possibility for difference; finally, the information was systematized using the Atlas.ti qualitative data processing software. The results showed that the role of the teacher-advocate is given through experience, difference, and crisis.

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Introduction.

The research arises as an opportunity to unveil the meanings of inclusive education from the perspective of the teacher, for the case of the research and henceforth teacher-intercessors¹, and the nuances it takes on in the uniqueness of the context.

In this study, the teacher-intercessor is conceived as a subject of research and investigator, who questions his practices, mobilises his theoretical positions, then he is always in an attitude of observation, learning, astonishment, recognising himself as an unfinished, ignorant teacher, that is, who knows that not everything has been said and that there are no absolute truths, therefore he is mobilised between learning and teaching.

For his part, the student diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, hereinafter [AS], is the case that allows us to analyse the interactions that the teacher establishes based on the implications that the interaction itself composes and the mechanisms with which he deals with everyday situations at school.

Inclusive education becomes a challenge for the teacher and questioned feelings appear, such as: "I am not prepared" and "I do not know how to teach them [students with disabilities]" (Skliar & Téllez, 2008; Zenteno-Osorio & Leal-Soto, 2016). Uncertainty about working in an unfamiliar world, about ways of being, thinking and acting that are different from what the normalising school has accustomed them to, is a constant, which has led to fractures, questioning and disagreements among teachers.

Teachers, students, and the school in general come to believe that integrating a student with a disability into mainstream classrooms requires a lot of time and attention from the teacher:

¹ A master intercessor is, to use Deleuze's (1996) metaphor, a surfer who stands on the edge, who is able to see what is in the centre and what is on the periphery.

There is no longer an origin as a starting point, but a way of putting oneself into orbit. It is fundamentally a matter of situating oneself in the movement of a great wave, of an ascending column of air, of "placing oneself between", and no longer of being the origin of an effort (Deleuze, Conversaciones, 1996, pág. 194).

This means that the teaching profession is often seen as depleted, that fear of violence is noticeable, and that teacher pessimism goes beyond what objective analysis of the system's performance would suggest (Dubet, 2005, p. 103).

Luengo (2005) indicates that the school was originally consolidated as a "good" institution in itself, offering spaces to instruct and train the worker, the citizen, "but this original idea has been analysed by critical sociologists, who have reached the conclusion that it is also an excluding institution" (p. 10), since on occasions, due to negative compassion, the abilities of students with disabilities are underestimated and their relationship with knowledge is limited. (INCLUSION WITH EXCLUSION)

The feelings, expressions and emotions of teachers do not only carry an accumulation of concern, disinterest or fear, but also make up a starting point, as Derrida (1996) states "this non-knowledge is the necessary condition for something to happen, for a responsibility to be assumed, for a decision to be taken" (p. 176). Therefore, this research focuses its interest on the teacher, who in the face of inclusive education has to seek, design, modify and implement different methods, strategies and ways of working that enhance the integral development of children and young people, regardless of their condition.

In accordance with the above, the research is directed under the question: what is the role of the teacher-teacher-intercessor in the process of interaction with a young person with asperger's disorder? In order to answer this question, it was proposed to characterise the conceptions of teacher-intercessors about inclusive education; to identify the implications for the teacher-intercessor of the interaction with a student with aspergers; and to determine the mechanisms with which the teacher-intercessors assume the interaction with a student with aspergers.

Methods

The research was developed with a qualitative approach, derived from the very nature of the study, in which the aim is to understand the role of the teacher

in the interaction with a student diagnosed with AS. In this sense, the researcher is an agent confronted with the complexity of the educational fact in an institution that develops an alternative pedagogy, which implies interests, contexts, relationships, concepts, and imaginaries loaded with meanings, which, when analysed, allow us to understand the interrelated characteristics that determine the phenomenon studied. In this case, we will interpret the relationships that are interwoven between the teacher, recognised in this institution as an intercessor, and the student with AS.

Within the qualitative approach, the research adopts the case study as a method, as the aim is to understand a, distinctive and important fact in which its uniqueness and complexity can be appreciated. The uniqueness refers to the singularity of the case, which makes it distinctive, conducive to be analysed through the people close to the case. Complexity refers to the interplay of social, cultural, political, temporal, and spatial interrelationships that occur within the context (Simons, 2011).

This research is divided into three moments for the collection and analysis of data from means or instruments that allowed, according to Strauss and Corbin (2012), “to discover concepts and relationships in the raw data and then organise them into a theoretical explanatory scheme” (p. 20).

Moments are not conceived as modules that do not communicate; it is not the overcoming of one stage to start another; it is not a linear process. The moment is seen as a coming and going, as it does not focus on following stages in a strict way; it is not dedicated to following the method in a rigid way, but prioritises the research problem, that is, it focuses on interpreting the relationship that is established between the teacher-intercessor and the student. The moments presented here are in dialogue with each other, they make use of each other and are taken up, whenever necessary, to study the phenomenon in depth.

Preparatory moment.

The research involved the investigation of educational policies and theoretical foundations related to the initial categories: Asperger’s and

teacher, and their interrelationships in the school context. A bibliographic search was carried out in 50 documents, including research articles and master’s and doctoral theses.

The review carried out revealed a concern for the study of inclusion, however, works that explicitly refer to the teacher in relation to the inclusion of students with Asperger’s are scarce and most of them focus their interest on guidelines for intervention from clinical aspects (Sepúlveda, 2013), as a result of the educational positions in force for many years, which were related to the rehabilitation and normalisation of the “different” subject.

Moment of recognition of the case.

Bearing in mind that the unit of analysis is the teacher, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four teachers identified as key informants who, due to their experiences and interrelationships with the student with Asperger’s, are an important source of information. Similarly, an in-depth interview was conducted with one of the teachers who created the educational institution to saturate some of the categories that emerged in the interviews with the teachers. Each participant previously signed the informed consent form, considering the ethical responsibility of the study.

Time for systematisation of information

At this point, the information was approached from the analysis of words, phrases, or sentences, with the aim of unveiling the in vivo or abstract codes. This micro-analysis requires examining the specifics of the data, in a way that allows the researcher to separate and recompose them to form an interpretative scheme (Strauss & Corbin, 2012). In this process, 57 codes were uncovered.

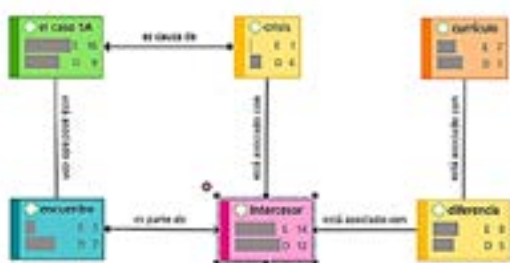
Further on, from the forest of codes, relationships were established, and concepts were grouped according to their salient properties, similarities and differences, in order to convert the codes into categories and subcategories. Subsequently, relationships were established between the categories and subcategories, which resulted in an axial (intercessor) code, as depicted in Figure 1, where the 6 main codes related

to each other, i.e., those with the highest rootedness and density, are shown.

This process was mediated by the software for qualitative data analysis Atlas.ti, version 8.0, in which the processes of comparison, contrasting, aggregation and ordering were carried out to visualise rootedness - quotes associated with the category - and density - relations of a category or subcategory with other subcategories - to finally see the construction of meanings.

Figure 1.

Axial category: Intercessor



Note: Rootedness (E) refers to citations associated with the code and Density (D) refers to relationships with other codes.

Results and Discussions.

In the results, the voice of the teacher-intercessor does not prevail as a discourse of truth, nor theories as legitimate and unique knowledge, as theory and practice are not conceived as separate or opposed. On the contrary, the results are the product of a tension between theory and practice. Consequently, the following results are not organised hierarchically. They intertwine and dialogue to reflect on the relationships that were established in the school between the advocates and the student diagnosed with AS, experiences crossed by crises, encounters and misunderstandings.

Teacher-intercessor from the event and experience.

Contemporary realities and the virtual spaces in which subjects are immersed, as accelerated movement, become a possibility for the teacher-intercessor who, in Deleuze's (1995) metaphor, is a

surfer on the edge, able to see what is in the centre and what is on the periphery. "There is no longer an origin as a starting point, but a way of putting oneself into orbit. It is fundamentally a matter of placing oneself in the movement of a big wave, of an ascending column of air, of placing oneself between, and no longer of being the origin of an effort" (p. 194).

In this way, it is evident that the role played by the teacher-intercessor in the interaction with a student with AS is not a linear relationship that starts from a fixed point to reach a determined and established end. The teacher-provider is given the opportunity to get to know all students, because he/she perceives them as unique beings, not as products. His or her role is not about a fixed, determined, and static path. That is why one of the teacher-teachers expresses: "it was not so important or important for us to know that he had an Asperger's condition or a special condition [...] we try to look and get to know him at first, what is he like, how does he relate to his classmates, how does he learn, what are his ways of working?"

In other words, the teacher-intercessor is detached from planning, measurability, and diagnosis; he or she privileges the experience and relationship with the student. This gives the school the opportunity to be a place of possibility, encounter, indeterminacy and experience, understood as that which bursts in, which occurs without the pretence of it happening and which may - or may not - modify what is planned and take it to unexpected and unthinkable places (Pino, 2017). The intercessor is the one who can navigate on turbulent waters and has the ability to feel the wave, to see from the periphery and various planes what others cannot see; he or she has sensitivity. In conclusion, "it is not configured in recipes, the teacher will never be sufficiently prepared" (Patiño & Patiño, 2018, p. 137).

The teacher as an intercessor, in terms of classroom interaction with the student with AS, behaves like the surfer who takes advantage of the movement to exploit their skills and create experiences that allow transformations, which, seen as power, configure the interaction to establish relationships that transcend the academic. In this way, not only the student with AS and their families, but also the other classmates and

members of the educational community are favoured.

[The intercessor] is not even the one who has complete knowledge, but the one who enables or empowers his or her environment for learning, so that we all enter into a shared enquiry. Advocate as the trigger that generates enthusiasm and curiosity for knowledge (interview excerpt).

The intercessor creates ruptures with the everyday and with what is planned, he/she does not place him/herself in a pedagogical model or tradition: “theory is important but one should not get married to it” (fragment of the interview with teacher-intercessors). Therefore, it does not have a predestined path. She does not prepare in advance to establish a certain relationship with her students. She considers that one is never prepared. He allocates time to know which subject is in front of him. Then, rather than sticking to a method, he sets out to be open and build relationships with his students. Intercessors recognise that the pedagogical issue is not located in a regime of truth.

By not following a method, the intercessor is a subject that enhances the experience to establish relationships with the students: “experience can be reading a text, watching a film, a visit to a place, an interview with someone, so we all live the experience” (excerpt from the interview with teacher-intercessors). Experience makes us think differently, constitutes ruptures and creates transformations.

In this sense, pedagogy, more than a theoretical matter, is a matter of subjectivities or processes of subjectivation, where subjects are traversed by it as an experience of education.

The intercessor moves as a “wanderer, the intercessor has intuition, the intercessor must investigate his own work, he is creative, he is didactic” (fragment of the interview with teacher-intercessors). He is a subject who questions his own conditions. He asks questions about himself, his movements, his location, and his transformations. He recognises possibilities and potentials. It does not move away from itself to follow a theory, method or author. He is not a faceless teacher. The intercessor does not distance himself from what is happening, nor from thinking. He does not renounce

himself, but, on the contrary, affirms his existence, his starting point. He recognises that not everything has been said, but that he is in constant movement, which makes him an indeterminate subject.

When the intercessor and the student are given the opportunity to live experiences, an act of creation arises. The intercessor is not only content to be reflective about pedagogical issues, but is a creator of new ways of thinking, new situations and new scenarios that enhance questioning and possibilities. Each intercessor finds his own method and his own style. He or she establishes a particular pedagogical relationship based on his or her experience, a way of mobilising himself or herself on the educational level.

We speak of an intercessor not only when it is centred on the teacher, but this role can also be played by the student, who helps to bring about thoughts, relationships, and encounters, which allow for creations. Therefore, for a relationship to be established, intercessors are essential. “Creation is the intercessors. Without them there is no work” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 156).

The intercessor: from inclusion to difference

For the educational institution, intercessors have different connotations, responsibilities and characteristics that differentiate them from traditional classroom teachers. They are subjects who allow themselves to be affected by the other, they are not alien, nor strangers; they are simply different, because they think, feel, behave and reason according to other logics, their logics, which are respectable and important to listen to.

In this way, thinking about difference in the institution is not a signalling or discrimination that distinguishes between normal and abnormal. “In this case, no, the difference is to identify us, to distinguish us, to know who we are” (excerpt from the interview with teacher-intercessors). This is why the intercessors disagree with the postulates of inclusion, which, according to several authors, from the very etymological component of the word, underlines a prior exclusion (Betancur, 2016; Skliar & Téllez, 2008) that implies a separation, a distance

that disagrees with a comparison between the different that is included in what should be. It is an attempt to make an alloy between two different ones.

To speak of inclusion presupposes the incorporation of something or someone who was outside and was not part of it. It also presupposes a path of classification to determine who is inside because of inclusion and who has always been inside, a question that in schools translates into several situations related to quality, adaptations, equality mechanisms, school failure and dropout, among others. The teacher in the context of inclusion accepts someone who has not been there from the beginning. He or she occupies a place that does not belong to him or her. He or she is a visitor who arrives at home but is not part of the family, an intruder who occupies a place that is not rightfully his or her own. The aim is to keep his stay as short as possible. “It is an acceptance based more on the person’s stay in the classroom than on his or her active and full participation in it” (Acoŝta & Arrez, 2014, p. 151).

Education from difference, contrary to inclusion, does not seek to normalise the other, because it does not think of the different as a stain on the world. It strips itself of the modern obsession with ordering and classifying to add categories and names that, in conclusion, separate and separate, categories that place subjects “in places of weakness, incapacity and impossibility, which is why they are considered as obstacles and problems for society” (Surez & Marino, 2018, p. 31). The school that orients its pedagogical postulates from difference does not seek a relationship “in which what is, or what there is, is subordinated to what should be” (Veiga Neto & Larrosa, 2009, p. 209).

Taking on the responsibility of accompanying someone to be is not easy. However, it is a possibility for the children and families who come here. Letting the child be what he/she wants to be implies, first of all, taking the time to allow oneself to be affected by the other, to get to know him/her and to know what his/her interests are, who his/her family is, what worries him/her, what knowledge he/she has; and from there, to accompany him/her in order to grow. (Excerpt from the interview)

The way of looking at the question of difference can be divided between the dualities: difference/problem and difference/possibility. The former relates to a negative plurality that needs to be homogenised through practices, procedures and means, such as the school, and transitively, means such as the teacher. When schools become a means of homogenisation, the teacher is the mechanism by which each learner profile is given what is necessary to be accommodated in a specific group or category, while at the same time attending to administrative provisions and documents that are given about dealing with the different learner.

The right to equality, to be included, thus becomes an experience of inequality, violence, subjugation, all under a noble educational intention, which many do not understand, because by thinking about their future, they are not thinking about their present (Suarez & Malagon, 2018).

In this anxiety of the different/problem is the teacher, who tries to comply with regulations loaded with sophistry, with results that, in some cases, only translate into better or worse inclusion rates per institution, which leaves in question what is important: the quality of the relationships that are interwoven in the educational spaces.

Difference, as a possibility, recognises difference as a characteristic of everyone, which makes it impossible to legitimise supremacy. It is to recognise that the human condition is plural and, therefore, education is the experience of plurality. It is the experience of difference that abandons all forms of distancing and, in agreement with Veiga-Neto and Larrosa (2009) requires.

To abandon the mode of identification and knowledge (thus abandoning the position of experts or specialists), to abandon the mode of purpose and ought to be (thus abandoning the position of moralists), and finally to abandon any approach in terms of inclusion/exclusion. (p. 212)

It is also important to abandon the discourse based on medical opinions and diagnoses, and to think about the person rather than, for example, HS. In this regard, one of the advocates shares the following:

I have never studied any of the cases [of autism], I don't even know how to typify them, and I have never studied that kind of things, nor have I been interested in it, nor do I want to study it. I think that was the biggest advantage, because not having studied it and not knowing about it, I was not filled with classification prejudices. By not having these notions, I found my own strategies for working with the boy and I don't pigeonhole him, and I won't stigmatise him, because I don't know what that is. I only work based on what I can relate to the child and what happened to me with Lucas was to approach him in spaces outside the classroom, so I sat down with him. He was fascinated by the fact that the intercessors sat and listened to him.

This way of thinking in school determines practices and relationships that go beyond the curriculum, by integrating strategies and adopting diverse ways from different logics that address the interests, abilities, difficulties, and conditions of the students, in order to contribute to a real flexibilisation of the curriculum.

The advocates do not conceive the curriculum as a list of subjects linked to a pretension of homogenising knowledge in relation to the stages of development and subjects that a subject should know at a certain age, but rather the curriculum is understood as that inherent relationship with the pedagogical. By recognising this relationship, curriculum issues imply a reflection that considers the subjects, the context and the needs of each individual, as Rangel (2015) says, “a curriculum anchored in social and educational processes (living curriculum) that is conceived and adopted in a deliberative and democratic way to respond to current educational problems and challenges” (p. 2). These challenges make it possible to create experiences with the subjects, characterised by vitality and transformation.

The crisis of the intercessor as power and possibility

In previous paragraphs it was mentioned that getting to know the learner is an important condition for establishing relationships in the classroom. However, this re-acquaintance does not come suddenly; it requires interest, commitment, and time, in which the intercessor may enter into a crisis, especially when faced with a situation unfamiliar to him/her, such as the arrival of a student with AS.

“Every order establishes a limit, beyond which the terrible territories of difference and the unknown expand” (Bravo, 2005, p.14). Thus, in school, difference becomes a crisis because it delves into the terrain of not knowing, of uncertainty, of bewilderment, which turns the teacher into an ignorant subject who no longer hides ignorance of the student up his sleeve, but of the student.

The teacher in the face of the ignored is challenged by the deconstruction of the prefixed images of the other and of that first impression, which, related to the person with AS, entails mystery, because of their lost look and their indecipherable body language; astonishment, because of their eidetic, melodic, or encyclopaedic memory; or fear, because of their episodes of anxiety, depression or anger.

For the intercessor, this crisis that produces the other as unknown - not because it seems alien to their constitution and nature, but because their paths have not been found before - is the trigger to develop three important qualities, which can and should be more: creativity, individual and shared research, and the setting in motion of a wandering and vulnerable intercessor exploring the fields of possibility and action.

Advocates, as a creative power, take the opportunity to get to know the student with AS and work for his or her learning. They quickly become vigilant observers who take advantage of every attitude, interest and weakness as material to establish relationships with knowledge. In this respect, one of the advocates recalls:

Lucas² was passionate about a lot of things. One thing he was passionate about for two or three years was dinosaurs, that is to say, passionate, passionate, and into the story! And I think that, if you ask him now, the memory that this man has is great [...] so if I know that he likes dinosaurs, how can I take advantage of that? So, he thought “they are giving me importance” or “they know me, and I am working on what I like”.

The intercessor is the creator and artist of his or her own work through the searches that constitute

² In order to protect the personal data of the persons under investigation, their names were changed to pseudonyms

a way of existence, allow him or her to change his or her daily life and help to transform the reality of others. The intercessor is the creator of conditions and situations that lead to significant experiences in the classroom. However, creation has to do with research, since its aim is transformation. Thus, the intercessor-researcher is the one who is concerned, who lives out of concern for the existence and doubt of methods, to stop being a planner and go on to mediate and cooperate in voluntary projects, individual or collective.

By investigating, the condition of curiosity, astonishment, and uncertainty about what surrounds us and about who we each are, in our particularity and difference, is harnessed and rescued. In this way, the intercessors in the work with Luke indicate: “he also set himself the task of researching what Asperger’s was, so he also told us and helped us [to understand it]” (fragment of the interview with teacher-intercessors).

Advocates sometimes need to venture into error and take advantage of it to identify what can be improved in their practices. It is not only important what is achieved in each process, but also to recognise the difficulties, the reasons for them and how they can be overcome.

The contemporary school demands new ways of inhabiting it that address the turbulence of the present time by recognising that uncertainty is a fact of life in the world, which is ignored in the illusory effort to walk on paths that represent security, while denying the irrefutable fact that the subject cannot predict his or her future. Therefore, intercessors and learners must behave as a multiplicity that establishes relationships through error. In this regard, Montes and Tiramonti (2008) state:

Wandering agency is constituted by an exploratory wandering that is dispersed and permeable to mixtures and heterogeneities. It is not a mere nomadism that seeks to deregulate its habitat, but a willingness to allow itself to be altered by the contingency that pushes it towards new horizons (p. 179)

Montes and Tiramonti (2008) also indicate that wandering finds in school a positive way to recreate trust and proximity with the other and with the other, without excessive formality. In Duschatzky’s terms

(2007), it is about new experiences in the open that escape the umbrella of the institution to discover the unpredictable, the new and the unexpected.

Ultimately, the crisis allows the advocate to develop diverse skills and respond in various ways that involve creativity, individual or collective research and the use of error as an activator of self-criticism and the finding and recognition of new scenarios for education.

Conclusions.

Conceiving the teacher as an intercessor starts from the recognition of the teacher as a vulnerable person who does not have complete knowledge and is exposed to error. However, from his or her commitment, he or she enables and promotes the conditions for learning, as a vigilant observer who takes advantage of the movements that take place within the classroom and on the periphery, in order to promote them.

Through dialogue it is possible to draw a picture of crisis, originating from the arrival at the institution of a young person with AS and taking into account the novelty of the case. This crisis is recognised as an opportunity to create new ways of being and doing in the intercessor and as a force that invites shared research involving the family and the diagnosed student.

The experience lived by the advocates, and described in this study, is defined by a way of experiencing the curriculum in a rhizome perspective, where difference moves in multiple directions and with diverse pretensions. However, this multiplicity gives rise to encounters.

The encounters with Lucas, in addition to favouring the knowledge of a condition through interaction and not through a medical diagnosis, favoured the progress of a person with thinking skills and relational skills that seemed improbable from the clinical point of view, but that in the educational institution found an opportunity to strengthen and demonstrate them.

When we set out to identify the conceptions that teachers have about educational inclusion, we found

that the teacher-intercessor finds in inclusion an exclusionary practice, which classifies and marks the other as a strange subject that requires processes and strategies. They also consider that for the institution it is more appropriate to talk about difference, not as a form of pointing out, but as a category that makes us common and at the same time identifies us, that helps us to know who we are to build on this recognition.

In the dialogue with the intercessors, it is clear that the strategies proposed with Lucas do not correspond to dynamics that were only applied with him but are ways of working on the basis of difference. In this logic, all students are different and require interactions that trigger encounters, disagreements, and crises.

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