

EXISTENTIAL COMMITMENT WITH TEACHING

Compromiso existencial con la enseñanza

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Abstract

The 'existential commitment with teaching' is one of the major findings stemming from a hermeneutic study at Mar del Plata State University, Argentina. With the intention of delving into the ethic dimension of university teaching, the narratives and practices of a Philosophy professor were analyzed. This teacher had been singled out by her students as an example of good teaching and had thus come to be regarded as a memorable professor in the context of academic production of the Research Team on Education and Cultural Studies (GIEEC). Existential commitment is indeed present in this professor's practices and narratives and embedded in a 'model of recognition', whose ethic component manifests in the regard of the student as an anthropological peer, the exercise of hospitality and the presence of generosity and empathy in the pedagogical bond. This study discusses materials produced in the methodological articulation of biographic narrative research and ethnographic research in education.

Keywords

Higher teaching, commitment, recognition, pedagogical practice.

Suggested form of citing: Flores, Graciela & Porta, Luis (2019). Compromiso existencial con la enseñanza. *Sophia, colección de Filosofía de la Educación*, 27(2), pp. 283-304.

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Resumen

El 'compromiso existencial con la enseñanza' es uno de los principales hallazgos de un estudio interpretativo realizado en la Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata, Argentina. En busca de comprensión de la dimensión ética de la enseñanza universitaria se estudian las narrativas y las prácticas de enseñanza de una profesora memorable de Filosofía que fuera previamente elegida por los estudiantes como ejemplo de buena enseñanza y como tal integra el grupo de profesores memorables identificados por el GIEEC (Grupo de Investigaciones en Educación y Estudios Culturales). El compromiso existencial de la docente está presente tanto en sus dichos como en sus prácticas, éstas se inscriben en el 'modelo del reconocimiento' cuya eticidad se manifiesta en la consideración del estudiante como par antropológico, en la hospitalidad en la enseñanza y en la presencia de generosidad y empatía en el vínculo pedagógico. El entramado interpretativo aborda materiales procedentes de una articulación metodológica entre el enfoque biográfico narrativo y la investigación etnográfica en educación.

Palabras clave

Educación Superior, compromiso, reconocimiento, práctica pedagógica.

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Introduction

The 'existential commitment with teaching' is an *in vivo* macrocategory developed in the study called *Ethical dimension of teaching. An interpretative study of the practices of memorable professors of the Faculty of Humanities of the National University of Mar del Plata*.¹ The mentioned study constitutes the doctoral thesis written for the Doctorate in Humanities and Arts with minor in Educational Sciences of the National University of Rosario, Argentina.

The interpretative study was methodologically supported in the narrative research articulating the biographical-narrative approach with ethnographic research techniques in education. This articulation allowed to weave the imports and meanings coming from the biographical narratives of memorable teachers with a diversity of materials obtained during the field work carried out during all the classes of a semester. Among the preexisting materials, there are contributions from the GIEEC (Research Group on Education and Cultural Studies, based in the Faculty of Humanities of the National University of Mar del Plata, Argentina) from the research carried out during successive projects through the narrative biographical approach applied to the study of didactics in the Higher Level. In the interpretative framework, categories previously constructed by the group are revisited and resignified and new ones are constructed based on the findings, within a particularly philosophical conceptual framework.

The methodology of the research is qualitative-interpretative. It allowed to enter the personal world of the subjects and to seek objectification in the field of meanings, as Reynaga Obregón (2003) says about this

type of methodological approach “emphasizes understanding and interpretation from the subjects and their process of meaning in concrete educational contexts, with their beliefs, intentions and motivations” (p 116). The narrative approach in educational research is linked to philosophical hermeneutics because it interprets linguistic experiences and because it aims to achieve an understanding of the subjects’ experiences that are always intersubjective, not transcendental but concrete and spatially and temporally situated.

The overall objective of the research aimed to understand the ethical dimension of the teaching of teachers highlighted by students in previously-carried out surveys, as examples of good teaching. Since among the particular objectives² we sought to articulate the discursive with the praxis, that is, what the protagonists expressed in their narratives when being interviewed, with the dynamics of action in the teaching practices of the teachers. For this, the ethnographic techniques were pertinent, on the other hand, the research was democratized by including various subjects involved in the classroom, such as students, ascribed, scholarship holders, members of the teaching teams. Methodological monism was also avoided by articulating narrative research with educational ethnography and the following instruments: biographical-narrative interview with the six professors, focus group with the six memorable teachers, focus interviews, flash interviews both with teachers and students at the end of classes, survey open to students, interviews with members of the career, focus group members of the career, observation records, audio and video records, self-records, field journal. The treatment of the abundant obtained material allowed the progressive construction of categories that express investigative findings around the ethical dimension of university education that have nurtured several publications.

In this opportunity, we present findings related to the narratives and teaching practices of Cecilia, a ‘memorable’³ teacher in charge of the theoretical classes of the subject Introduction to Philosophy in the Majors of Teaching and Degree in Philosophy of the Faculty of Humanities of the National University of Mar del Plata.

The macro-category ‘existential commitment to teaching’ appears initially in Cecilia’s narrative in this way:

Education as an ethical-political fact is part of an urgent task: to rethink the very place of installation, to rethink the existential commitment to sustain a praxis of high social impact, as is the teaching task; rethinking knowledge and action as a resistance to the des-subjective, individualistic and narcotizing model, which tends to cross the current anthropo-



logical situation based on the vulnerability of the collective, in which we are all immersed. (Cecilia, 2013)⁴

This way of understanding education can be considered constitutive of the ethical dimension of education because it involves axiological and deontic issues that overlap in the practices.

Next, the meanings of commitment are addressed in the context of the study. Then the 'recognition model' that constitutes the core of the teacher's existential commitment is explained. This part of the article presents the four dimensions that according to the findings of the study make up this model: the student as an anthropological peer, hospitality in teaching, generosity as a moral value made effective in teaching practices and the role of empathy as vital aspect of recognition.

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Meaning of existential commitment with teaching

In general, commitment can be understood as contractual obligation contracted as a duty established by professional practice, however, the meaning of 'existential commitment' widely exceeds the limits of this type of duties. Regarding the origin of commitment, in a sociological sense it is estimated that it may arise from some incident in which the subject is part in an occasional manner; however, as will be seen later, in Cecilia's teaching practices the commitment is not merely occasional.

The commitment according to Giraud (2013) can be understood taking into account its two action logics that account for a questioning or evidence. As for the first logic, it is a questioning position that points both to knowing and acting, in this sense it is a constitutive part of being in the world. The questioning position is not a grammatical question, it is a philosophical question linked to some problem, also philosophical, that is, that worries over time and has had and has multiple answers, none closed and satisfactory in such a way that solves the problem.

The second logic links social evidence and commitment, understanding by 'social evidence' the set of beliefs that are shared as facts, that could not be doubted because they are shared by others and constitute an orientation for life, beliefs that do not seem to be questioned for being based on good reasons; in the order of knowledge, a social evidence is a doxa that is sustained in the reception and positive adherence to 'what is said'. These two 'logics' of commitment have provoked reflection around two questions that are linked to teaching: to. How and why the question related to a problem is located at the origin of commitment in the edu-

educational field? b. How and why are beliefs as 'social evidence' at the origin of that commitment?

The formulation of these questions involves the challenge of facing that the practices in the educational field are social, contextual and complex. Assuming this complexity means taking into account that these are subjective practices that require dialogue with the unique situations presented by the practice, it also means taking into account that these situations require interventions by teachers, linked to their commitment to their teaching role.

The complexity also comes from the fact that there is no educational practice that is not political and that there is no educational practice without ethics, as Freire (2009) says. It is interpreted that Cecilia's existential commitment means assuming the aforementioned complexity through an ethical and political positioning that is neither occasional nor contractual.

Bearing in mind that commitment to teaching is complex because it is social, cultural, ethical and political, when thinking about the questions that are at the 'origin' of commitment, the ethical questions par excellence are presented: What is valuable in life? and what should I do?

If, as Castoriadis (1997) says, the question: What should I do? It is essentially political and if politics is the lucid and reflective activity that interrogates about the institutions of society and aspires to transform them, to consider the overlap between ethics and politics is a necessary condition to understand the existential commitment of Cecilia with teaching.

Then, the questions that are at the origin of the commitment, according to how the teacher interprets them and according to how they act in this regard, can have an effect on what Giroux and McLaren (1998) call "emancipatory authority" and that as such it is carrier of a critical knowledge, rules and values through which articulates and problematizes her relationship with students, her subject and the community. The authority of Cecilia as a teacher is inscribed both in this register and in the order of what Fallilone (2017) calls 'community education', consisting of practices that address 'otherness' and are actively committed and responsible with the freedom of students.

Regarding the question exposed as b, the 'beliefs' that are at the origin of the commitment that in a sociological sense are assumed as 'social evidence' (Giraud, 2013), are not assumed as evidences by Cecilia, her 'installation model'⁵ in teaching excludes the hegemonic power of crystallized beliefs. Facing the conflict between the instituted and the



instituting, or in other words, between conservation and realization (as antagonistic polarities) her decision is to remove the naturalized by common sense or the opinion of many and carry out counterhegemonic practices for the benefit of her students. It is not by inertia or by force of the instituted that Cecilia is committed to teaching and therefore to her students. As an emancipatory authority, her awareness of certain elements that at the university level threaten the subjectivity of students allows her to transform adverse conditions in the classroom.

The number of students that make up the group (more than 80) does not prevent her from fighting the anonymization or the coldness that generally characterizes the pedagogical bond when the group is so numerous in theoretical classes; the tradition that characterizes the theoretical classes as expository, does not prevent her from establishing a community where the discourse circulates freely and each student is a participant of the class by means of different interventions because her teaching constitutes that, which from the findings of the research, has been called 'model of recognition'.

Then, at the origin of Cecilia's commitment, the questions are ethical-political and beliefs are not common or subject to the force of the established. The questions with which the presentation of the existential commitment begin with teaching alluding to the 'origin' of the commitment, but in this study explaining an origin would be to practice reductionism limited to causes, in addition the findings widely overflow that aspect because they allow to understand how that commitment materializes in teaching practices.

The model of recognition: core of meaning of existential commitment with teaching

During the interpretive work the framework of materials allowed deepening the meanings of commitment in university teaching, then the questions expressed before: a and b were modified, contextualized, resignified and deepened from the polyphonic configuration of the findings, since the subjects signify and give meaning to the world and its life in a narrative way. The questions that follow, are those that emerged after material revisions and allowed to guide the construction of this macrocategory: to. What are the meanings of a memorable teacher's existential commitment to teaching? b. What meanings entails a pedagogical bond where the recognition of otherness is part of the existential commitment? c. What



meanings does the power-knowledge relationship involve as a configurator of subjectivities within the framework of existential commitment?

When asking the memorable teacher how she understands the existential commitment to teaching, she said:

The task goes through the *recognition model*: to be able to see the other, to attend to his word turned into presence, to listen to his claim, to trust in his poetic possibilities, this is to trust in his possibilities of action. (Cecilia interview).

From her narrative a central subcategory emerges for the understanding of her commitment: the recognition model, which consists of four dimensions, ‘the student as an anthropological peer’, ‘hospitality in teaching’, generosity and empathy.

*The student as an anthropological peer*⁶

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The inclusion of all subjects in the existential territory that is the class, is a goal of the teacher. Cecilia said in an interview corresponding to this research that for her teaching is a ‘bonding act’ and seeks to gestate a ‘bond warp’ in which all are included. In this regard she clarifies:

Managing a bonding weft (...) is a principle of ethical installation, therefore, generating a bonding space does not mean a demagogic gesture, it means the true recognition of the other as another. Affection is built on that first perception of the student as a peer, as an anthropological peer. (Cecilia interview)

The consideration of the student as an anthropological peer helps to avoid the laxity of indifference and the atomization of what Cecilia calls ‘the current anthropological conjuncture’.

The otherness of the students affects Cecilia existentially, because as she explained in a focus interview, her conception of ‘life’ does not refer to living isolated events, life is not a sum of anecdotal facts without a cohesive sense; she understands life in the Aristotelian sense, the *bios* as the practice of life in the sense of true continuity, that *bios* is not ‘biological’ life but life as existence. In the existential sense, life is a relation to the world and to others, therefore it can be interpreted that there is the most powerful meaning of her expression ‘existential commitment’.

As has been shown before, Cecilia considers the students as ‘anthropological peers’, that ‘first instance of mutual recognition’ “(as she said at another moment of the interview) constitutes the ontological and ethical network of the bonding weft. These considerations are closely

linked to her 'passionate teaching'²⁷ When asked in a flash interview about the meaning that passion in teaching has for her, she answered:

Passion conjures the narcotic effects of some contemporary issues. To feel passionate, affected, recognition of the other is necessary. You cannot teach with passion if there is no recognition of the other as another. You have to discover the other. We are in a hurry, I do not know if we are really communicating, to recognize the other is a way to stop time, to co-manage a conviviality space to affect each other. The classroom is a space for transformation and to mutually affect each other; there has to be mutual recognition. (Flash interview, Cecilia)

According to Cecilia, recognition is a condition for the possibility of passionate teaching. If one takes into account that for her life is true continuity, it can be noticed that her 'didactic installation model' (of which she spoke in the biographical interview and in some subsequent interviews) involves her existential commitment to teaching and to the subjects students, which does not mean in any way neglecting the academic rigor in terms of teaching the object of study, as she herself clarified in an interview. Commitment also means taking responsibility for acting in the current situation of her students.

Facing the ways of being of the students, negativized by a spread negative collective vision, Cecilia decides to get rid of 'what is said' about them and value them without prejudice. This decision is both emotional and rational. In relation to what has been said, Cecilia clarifies:

There is an *initial presupposition*, which to my liking is of an ethical and political nature. It is ethical because I think it is returning a model of installation in teaching, it is ethical as a way of being, a way of being that returns to a practice model, of professional praxis. And it is political because there is a power game between students and teachers, a power game that sustains the praxis itself, which generates transformations in the students and the teacher. (Cecilia interview)

Cecilia's previous insights can be better understood by resorting to Foucaultian thought, especially considering that the teacher has dedicated to the study of his work for decades (this is expressed in the biographical interview and is explicit in her classes). For Foucault (2006) it is necessary to think about the current situation in which one is immersed, which implies dealing with three areas: how beings have been constituted as subjects of knowledge, as subjects that exercise or support power relations and as moral subjects. This thinking would be like an *ethos*, where the critique of the limits that are imposed includes the possibility of ex-



ceeding them. But the philosopher also points out that practical systems come from three major domains related to each other: that of relations of control over things (the axis of knowledge), that of relations of action over others (the axis of power), and that of relationships with oneself (the axis of ethics). According to the research findings, Cecilia takes this triple relationship into account when thinking about teaching.

The framework of power, knowledge and ethics (in the Foucaultian sense) is visibilized and taken into account by Cecilia in a critical manner. In her teaching model she does not position herself as the one wielding power, she is critical of certain 'dissymmetries' that usually appear in the practices of some teachers:

One does not know exactly who that teacher is talking to when he does not show gestures tending to build bridges of understanding with the student. (...) It seems to me that there is something that contains desires that the other will not be able to know what I know. Some dissymmetries that the teaching practice usually present, and that have to do precisely with power games, are those which position teachers and students in highly crystallized roles. (Cecilia interview)

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This narrative makes it possible to allude to the metaphor of the bridge and the wall, to build 'bridges of understanding' is a facilitation of access, an invitation to admission, it is a hospitable gesture to the newcomer. The wall is the border that prevents entry and positions teachers in a protected space, away from the other, protected from the need to strive for understanding and protected in its halo of academic solemnity as if their authority were at risk if the stranger calls for them.

For Cecilia 'building bridges of understanding' does not mean representing the fiction that she does not know more about the subject than her students, the sense of ontological parity is not in denying her trajectory and practical wisdom, the aim is overcoming prejudices in around students as ignorant or inferior, because according to her, her knowledge does not position her at a superior level:

To consider the student as an anthropological peer does not dissolve the initial hierarchies in the sustaining of the practice, undoubtedly I know more philosophy than those that I have in front of me, which does not imply that the first positioning is not the *recognition of those students as peers, as peers in their condition of subjects, without prejudice (...)*. (Cecilia interview)

This position favors a good relationship with the students. If, as Sarason (2002) says, an obligation of good teachers is the relationship

with the students because teaching entails the need to establish the empathy that enables the bond and thus the teacher assumes a commitment to the possibility of moving the other. One way to move the other is the model of recognition that allows Cecilia to confirm that commitment, to be moved and to move in the educational relationship.

With the very brief exposition of the category ‘the student as an anthropological peer’ (as one of the constitutive dimensions of the recognition model), an attempt has been made to answer one of the initial questions: What meanings does a pedagogical bond imply where recognition of otherness is it part of the existential commitment?

The complexity of the question leads to another constitutive dimension of the recognition model: ‘hospitality in teaching’.

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*The student as a guest: hospitality in teaching*⁸

Recognition and hospitality are concepts of relationship, that is why the narrative of the teacher, the narrative of the students and the class registers (understood as narratives) are articulated in their exposition, and in the interpretation the main recourse is the ethics of relationships.

The ‘hospitality’ according to Innerarity (2008) is an ethical category that is revealed mainly as the openness to the other and the others, is to be accessible and attentive to the requirements of others and the world, in that sense it would be the “basic ethical competence” (p. 19). This ‘competence’ is understood as ‘encounter’ with the other, it is a host-guest dialectic, completely removed from a self-sufficient subjectivity.

It has been shown that for Cecilia there is no self-sufficient subjectivity, since she is not independent of otherness, who would claim such independence would fall into what she calls ‘narcissistic return’, which attempts against coexistence.

Hospitality is not considered by the teacher as a competence but as a condition of teaching:

To teach you have to be able to pronounce ‘you’ and manage the space ‘between’ which means an almost homeric reciprocity gesture. We must welcome the other, grant their emotional space as a *guest*. (Flash interview. Cecilia)

Cecilia does not attempt existential self-affirmation by fabricating a self-confirming choreography through recognition, her way of practicing recognition is inscribed in the guest-host dialectic where the interpellation of the other is a primordial feature.

She moves away from the modern conception of the omnipotent and exalted self in a Cartesian sense, as it has been seen that existential interdependence makes each subject confirm his own being in the relationship with the other. This added to her conception of life as a continuum (as Aristotelian bios) that highlights human temporality and therefore human finitude, forms a position that in the sense of Innerarity (2008) can be considered existentially as “the ambiguous experience of feeling interpellated and knowing oneself finite at the same time, which is the threshold by which one access to a type of duties that no longer uses the imperative language of power but that of the request” (p. 26).

This experience of those who feel interpellated and use the language of the request is in accordance with a peculiar conception of commitment. According to Giraud (2013): “Commitment for the benefit of a cause such as hospitality rests on a militant conviction that makes space a common territory for all” (p. 133).⁹

This territory common to all, in the context of this study, is the classroom. It is the space of appearance and is the space of the meeting, but to be it, it must be managed, we must hospitably inhabit it, because: “The classroom is a space of transformation and to affect each other there must be mutual recognition” (Flash interview, Cecilia).

According to Mèlich (2006) education is mainly transforming and transforming oneself into the educational event, which as a pedagogical relation, is an expression of human relationship in a broad sense and “one of the effects of every commitment is the transformation of oneself and of the relationship with others” as explained by Giraud (2013, p.184). In this sense, transformations take place within the framework of horizontality of the pedagogical bond, in the sense of ontological parity. A student respondent says: “Cecilia is professional because she demonstrates her commitment to her profession. First of all, her knowledge does not show arrogance in the student-teacher relationship (...)” (Student Survey 40).

Ethics, as a request addressed to the person who is different from oneself, as non-indifference, is a dis-interest that breaks the obstinacy of being, which inaugurates the order of the human. As Levinas (2001) says in this human investment of the in-oneself and the for-oneself, of the each for oneself in an ethical self, in the priority of the for-another, there is a substitution of the for-oneself of the ontological obstinacy by a self that is a responsible, non-transferable and irrecusable choice, in a radical inversion that occurs in the “encounter with the face of the other” (p.250). Within the framework of this study it is estimated that there is no need to defend the primacy of being as opposed to the primacy of the ethical



relationship in the Levinasian sense. The complementarity between ontology and ethics is not resigned, it is not believed that an 'origin' must be based on the human relationship, posing an infertile confrontation between what was 'before'. Although for the philosopher the encounter with the face of the other takes place before the ontology, the convergence between the ontological equality and the presence of the other as another is entered in such a way that both are inseparable when interpreting the teaching of Cecilia.

Generosity in the recognition model

A relevant ethical aspect of Cecilia's existential commitment to teaching is the presence of 'generosity' as a moral value constitutive of her teaching practices.

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Generosity is one of the moral values that make up the ethos, it encompasses the diversity of human activity and also the convictions, beliefs and attitudes with which that act is judged. Since, as Maliandi (2004) says through language, values of ethos are learned in words such as commitment, generosity, trust, responsibility, in Cecilia's teaching these words make sense, what she calls "recession of the word" does not take place. In addition, the findings about generosity show the existence of what Terrones Rodríguez (2017) calls 'common ethos' that is constructed from the perspective of the recognition of the collective, in an intersubjective way and not inscribed in instrumental rationality. Next, the presence of generosity in relation to time and the vital energy of the teacher is made explicit.

Cecilia maintains an attitude predisposed to collaboration and support for the possible requirements of students during all classes by answering all questions and queries, although this means spending a lot of time in class on these issues. But in addition, generosity expresses itself in peculiar ways. In the first class, Cecilia writes on the board her name, email address, telephone number and times when students can find her and tells them: "You can call me as many times as you want, these things are not ornamental. They for using them. You can call me as many times as you need and here is my mail, which of course, you can also use it "(Registration Class1-IF).

Her generosity adopts the mode of offering her personal time to the service of the students. This request before the other that exceeds the time limit of the class clearly shows her existential commitment to teaching, the temporality of the educational event is inscribed in the record of one's life as a continuum, the subjects with whom she constructs what

she calls the ‘contract with the affections’ are included in the subject, they are ‘incorporated’ into the order of the discourse as the teacher’s intention but they also enter into the intersubjective relationship between ontological peers that transcends the professional barrier and overlaps the vital space.

In another class (Class Record 4) prior to a partial test, when a student asks a question, she responds and then adds:

All right. Of course, you can count on me. The other day someone called me on the phone to ask me a question. Perfect! Like that. He called me to Buenos Aires! Someone who was studying... When you study, you can call me if you need. He will have spent his good twine calling! (Generalized laughter) (Class 4-IF Record)

The teacher is aware that her first-year students are beginners in university life. In the survey made to the students, the mention of the generosity of the teacher (at the point where they were asked to characterize her teaching) is highlighted. Students also use analogous concepts such as ‘service’, ‘availability’, ‘openness’, which they then explain in narratives such as the following: “The teacher is open and receptive to the needs of the students and always willing to cooperate with them.” (Student Survey 14).

Cecilia is generous with the time of her class when she interrupts her explanations to devote herself to receiving the ‘guest’ (the student), even if the student’s arrival is unexpected, that is, outside of the established schedule. During a class (Class 5-IF record) the teacher was explaining what in philosophy is called ‘cosmogonic stage’ when a student enters. Cecilia stops explaining and speaks to her: “Hello dear...” The student looks for a place to sit, Cecilia looks for empty chairs at the back and says pointing to the chair occupied with her belongings: “Look, here you can also sit. It’s uncomfortable there...” She approaches the chair where she had left her personal belongings and begins to remove them saying: “Look, here... (Noises). It does not bother me! Put your stuff here. Do not put the wallet on the ground, it seems that the money is gone, the dollars, the wealth, the private property are lost, on the ground... Better put it here”. (She laughs and generalized laughter occurs). When the student finally sits Cecilia says with the same kind tone: “Very good. Are you good here, dear?” (Class 5-IF Record). This is one of the many situations in which the teacher does not hesitate to dedicate time to who enters the classroom, because the dedicated minutes are not lost, there is no ‘waste’ of time when the student is a guest.



She is also generous with the eight assistants; she gives half of the last four classes so that they can present their subject and start on the path of teaching. The gestures of generosity in the class and the generosity in the space of her private life can be interpreted in a Spinozist sense and in a sense of 'prodigality' which is an expenditure of energy, but it is not understood as a merchandise that is donated.

Regarding the first sense, the philosopher says that by generosity he understands "the desire for which each one strives to help other men and unite them to themselves for friendship" (Spinoza in Tatián, 2012, p.44). In the Spinozist way of understanding generosity, reason and affection complement each other, it is an active affect, a desire guided by reason towards others, it is a productive force of friendship. According to Tatián (2012), it is explained as "force that pursues the conservation of the other, because perseverance in being (*conatus*) has a collective dimension that does not disregard others, but includes them" (p. 45).

Cecilia does not manage her assets, her life, her existence (neither her knowledge nor her time) as an economist, as an owner, as a merchant seeking rewards for the given, or as a compassionate donor who sympathizes with ignorance and need of the students. According to Onfray (2014) "prodigality is an artist's virtue" (p.107). In this sense, generosity (understood as prodigality) is lavish and has to do with disproportion, it is a Dionysian behavior in which spending is a celebration, it is opposed to the position of those who treasure time and existence in pursuit of order and the immobility that gives them security and ignore the passion, dynamism, laughter, the flashing existence that corresponds to the artist. Thus understood, generosity offers the possibility of interpreting that virtue as an artist is inherent in the recognition model, characteristic of the existential commitment to teaching.

The 'spending' of prodigality in this perspective is aesthetic, generosity is typical of an aesthetic of existence that seeks care for oneself and others. But also, the generosity thus understood is ethical because if 'passionate teaching' causes potentiating conditions, the expense of time and energy entails what Onfray (2014) calls 'deployment logic' where prodigality (the gift), would correlate the sum of strength to the forces. This generosity is then contrary to the 'logic of withdrawal' to which these teachers could inscribe, in addition to not 'building bridges of understanding', as Cecilia said, they stay affectionately distant from their students and dissociate mind and body.

Generosity also involves the 'spending' of body energy.



Class records show that during each of the classes Cecilia walks, moves, never sits or adopts a body posture of relaxation, except for moments when she narrates some funny anecdote or makes a joke. The teacher is fervently opposed to this logic of withdrawal that reserves energy, time, words of affection, when she says:

I believe that there is something of the body that teaches. There is something about the body that captivates attention. A kind of vigor, passion, pathos in the Greek sense of affection. Do not skimp on the human feeling of feeling affected by the class. I believe that there is something there, that operates as a form of contagion, as an enthusiasm to show enthusiasm, I think it can be a tool that excites, in addition to becoming an element that holds attention. (...) In ideas there is something dead. In ideas and concepts, I believe that in this Nietzsche was right, there is something static, there is something crystallized. (Cecilia interview)

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From this narrative can be understood the notion of ‘spending’ as generosity (prodigality) of bodily energy, as an excess of physical effort that vitalizes ideas and concepts that lose their crystallized character to become ideas in movement, a display that excites and affects everyone in the class. There is no reserve of energy, there is a desire that everyone remain included in the class through all the available ‘tools’, and one of them is the effort of the teacher. As Cecilia said already in the biographical interview: “The effort... I give my life and the boy understands” (Biographical interview).

This commitment combines bodily effort in the sense of movement, movement through the classroom, modulation of the voice, writing on the blackboard, attentive listening to the students’ voices and pertinent responses that lead to openness to dialogue, involving the movement of ideas, that is, it is the combination of his observable behavior and her unobservable behavior that gives full meaning to her expression (cited above) that alludes to ‘giving her life’ in the classroom.

This giving of oneself as outpouring of her vitality, is a continuity in the narrative of Cecilia, it is not random or anecdotal elements, the persistence of prodigality in that sense is present in the first interview (biographical), in the interview during the stage of fieldwork in the classroom and in the focus interview.

The pedagogical value of the effort, of the prodigality of Cecilia’s own body energy is of the existential register and its meaning is deepened in the following narrative piece of a focus interview:

I believe that the teaching work is a form of giving oneself, of that emotional giving oneself. And it seems to me that the giving oneself goes all the way, you put out everything you have. Then it also puts the body, puts other elements than just the pure concatenation of ideas. (Focal Interview 1. Cecilia)

This belief of the teacher regarding the ‘teaching work’ as a ‘form of giving oneself’ is realized through generosity in the forms explained above and through empathy in a philosophical sense.

Empathy in the recognition model

The deployment of energy during the classes, according to Cecilia can generate an adhesion, a contagion of enthusiasm (a form of harmony) if a common space has been achieved where the affections circulates:

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It seems to me that where energy is deployed there can be contagious adhesion, if the conditions of possibility of empathy can be generated. If it is possible to fertilize a common space where affection circulates, (...) it seems to me that these environments are contagious. Empathy is a way of meeting, a way of being in the same wave length with the other. If the conditions of possibility of a teaching practice are reached where energy, the affection, understanding of the object that has been cut circulates, there is pleasure. There is pleasure. It is a pleasant experience. And it is happening. I see students infected with enthusiasm. Because the climate of contagion has been generated. Through contact one gets what the other has to offer. (Focal Interview 2. Cecilia)

According to the research findings Cecilia achieves that ‘the conditions of possibility of empathy’ occur, as well as the ‘contagion’ understood by her as ‘the possibility of convergence’, as ‘form of meeting’, as ‘way of being’ in a similar situation’. Up to this point, dimensions of the recognition model have been developed, but the approach to empathy in teaching is missing since it is a dimension of recognition that allows deepening the sense of intersubjectivity in the existential commitment of the teacher. The interpretation of empathy requires taking into account especially that Cecilia’s narrative point out that for her empathy and ‘contagion’ of enthusiasm and passion do not mean the same thing.

To deepen the meaning of empathy, it is initially worth mentioning that the term houses a semantic plurality that needs to be clarified. In current times, sympathy (in the Humean sense) has been differentiated of empathy and this has been considered as an epistemological concept, as an ethical concept, and as a concept with political derivations, but it is

not only a 'concept', it can also be understood as a social emotion, more precisely, as what Elster (2002) calls 'emotion of interaction', since the subject experiences the concept, that is, the experience of empathy is lived experience and as such is cognitive-affective.

Empathy can be understood as the result of an overestimation of the similarity between the observer and the observed so that this overestimation is a condition for empathy to occur, empathy in turn requires some control in order not to conceive others as similar, so, as Breithaupt (2011) affirms, "the challenge of empathy consists in producing non-similarity" (p.87).¹⁰

Empathy does not occur because it overestimates similarities or involves the challenge of producing non-similarity. The ontological equality alluded to by Cecilia is not an 'overestimation' but the recognition of parity between living subjects, it is ontological parity. There is always some difference that acts as a limit, but diffuse and permeable, between two equal but different beings that affect each other, because it is in the interference of the other where the unexpectedness of the alterity is injected into the yes. In the encounter with the other there is a mismatch of being in the detection of otherness, empathy is not a misleading or homogenizing perception.

In the intersubjective relationship empathy produces neither similarity nor difference, what it produces is an 'alteration' of the relationship. Empathy is a call for reciprocal attention, it is an 'openness' of one's self towards the other, it is an inclusive attention, an entrance to otherness. That is, to think that empathy is an emotional contagion would be reductionist and simplistic. It is estimated that it can also be a form of knowledge of the other, because it is also 'suffering' with the other, is feeling affected by the affections of the other, but as we said, is an entrance to otherness, not as epistemic violence but as inclusive attention.

A classroom situation (Class 3 Record), added to the narrative of Cecilia in the oriented interview, regarding the multiplicity of meanings of empathy, to prioritize the meaning of it as 'inclusive attention'. Cecilia told the students:

And then, in my opinion, this communication is in the sense of recognition of the other, but there is no communication of any kind, if the other is lost sight of, it is because I am too distracted or too concentrated in a narcissistic return that I do not see the other. From communities of men to countries, from the micro to the macro what I am saying. This has to do with Ethics (Class 3-IF Record).



For the teacher, it is necessary not to become self-absorbed and to 'see' the other. That look refers to empathy as inclusive attention since the receptivity of alterity moves the subject away from what Cecilia calls "narcissistic return", that is, from the return to what for Innerarity (2008) in ethic of hospitality is "the natural tendency to self-redundancy, to resemble oneself too much" (p 21).

Cecilia offers in her narrative her way of understanding the relationship between empathy and teaching as a pedagogical and ethical event that involves the position of the teacher, the presence of students and the discourse:

In the classes, it seems to me that something intense happens. Why? Because something touches them, something brushes them. There is, by the dynamics of the classes, something of the order of the empathy that is generated. There is something of the order of groups of students who remain years and years near the major, as if the subject became a place of contention, of learning. So, what I see happening, what I see coming is something new, something good, something that enriches from that perspective there is advent, there is an event. *There is something that is generated between the discourse and the position of the teacher and those who are there waiting and willing to give. (...) Many spaces of freedom are generated without losing one thing, in any case, very precise in what refers to the transmission of knowledge and others; but they occur in a climate of rigor, but of affection. Of rigor, but at the same time of relaxation. (Focal Interview 1. Cecilia)*

Empathy as a call to reciprocal attention and as an opening to otherness is reflected in Cecilia's experience as something 'intense' that happens through the dynamics of classes, since the presence of affection generates an environment of 'relaxed bonding'. This environment entails a strong pedagogical sense of empathy, what Mèlich (2006) calls 'compathy', a term understood by the philosopher of education as 'compassion' that is not pity for the other but 'shared passion', in such a way that does not remain impassive before the feelings of the other, either of anguish, suffering, joy or happiness. Then through empathy the teacher does not remain impassive either to other feelings of the students that could generate an environment of bonding tension. This is another sense of empathy consistent with hospitality in teaching.

For reasons of space, the numerous narratives of classes where empathy is expressed in the use of colloquial language, the appeal to humor to sustain attention and maintain a relaxed atmosphere, the inclusion



of examples of daily life, repetition of concepts to facilitate the taking of notes and careful listening are not transcribed here.

Empathy is expressed as pedagogical sensitivity that it to generate the environment conducive to the 'relaxed bonding' and understand how students feel when they first hear expressions of philosophical language, because as we said in the interview, they think that who cannot order of discourse 'feels ignored'.

The teacher responds to the call of the other who expects to know, tending 'bridges of understanding' as she also said when interviewed, because she thinks that we should want the other to get to know. Then, empathy can be interpreted as opening one's self to the other and as a shared passion, it can be included among the "tools at the service of the incorporation of the student to the class, to the project, to the program, to the career" (Interview Cecilia).

Another meaning of empathy complements those exposed above, Sennet (2012) understands empathy as 'form of involvement'. Empathy generates bonds that allow the advent of 'something new, something good', as Cecilia says, that novelty and benefit come about because the openness to otherness enables attention to the other and subjective involvement to occur, then the class becomes the meeting space, because as Sennet (2012) says "both sympathy and empathy transmit recognition and both generate a bond, but one is an embrace, while the other is an encounter" (p 40).

The empathy in the 'affective weft' installs a common experiential platform and compromises the implication, thus contributing to the resistance against the 'des-subjective, individualistic and narcotizing model, which usually crosses the current anthropological juncture' as Cecilia says in the narrative snippet with which the approach of the 'existential commitment with teaching' begins.

As a conclusion

The understanding of the ethical dimension of university education is favored by the macro-category 'existential commitment to teaching' that is specified in 'the model of recognition' and includes the consideration of the student as an anthropological peer and hospitality in teaching that entails generosity and empathy.

The model of recognition involves teaching practices aimed at achieving the effective inclusion of students in the dynamics of the class,



through the peculiar characteristics that Cecilia manages to imprint on the pedagogical bond as a joint construction, based on an ethical position that does not exclude the epistemological, that assumes the student's subjectivity as someone whose ontological quality is the same as who teaches. It is not about any homogenization that would subsume the other in a sameness, but includes the students in the same bonding weft without hierarchical stratification that disparages them.

Recognition translates into committed involvement with otherness, where others are not mere alter ego but beings who by their very presence summon those who, as a teacher, are willing to feel summoned because they are aware that in educational institutions the bonds with the subjects can constrain the possibilities of recognition.

Life in the classroom is imbued with hospitality, in analogy with hospitality in other human relationships it entails a rationality that is not identified with domination but with openness and receptivity. Hospitality involves the order of the affection, not only to act but also to suffer with the other. That is, it implies enough sensitivity to accept the interpellation of alterity, in a complex interplay between affection and intellect, that bonding weft contrasts with the hostility of practices that exclude and belittle students as subjects.

Generosity as a constitutive moral value of the ethical dimension of education is presented as prodigality and is combined with empathy that allows the consolidation of a peculiar pedagogical link that affects the subjective experiences of students. Both empathy and generosity are values of actions, that is, non-abstract moral values but actualized (put into action) in Cecilia's teaching practices.

The findings that have been explained contribute to understand the multiplicity of meanings of the ethical dimension of teaching and encourage us to continue this investigative path in search of knowledge of what the best teachers think, feel, say and do in their classrooms.

Notes

- 1 Doctoral thesis written by Graciela Flores, directed by Dr. Luis Porta, publicly defended in April 2018 at the National University of Rosario, Argentina, rated with 10 and publication recommendation. The mentioned study constitutes the doctoral thesis written for the Doctorate in Humanities and Arts with minor in Educational Sciences of the National University of Rosario, Argentina.
- 2 The particular objectives of the study were the following: Identify continuities and ruptures between "the discursive" of the (auto) biographies of the memorable teachers and the dynamics "of the action" of the practice itself. Analyze the characte-



- ristics of the ethical dimension of university education in the teaching practices of teachers designated as memorable by their students in the Faculty of Humanities of the National University of Mar del Plata. Analyze categories associated with the ethical dimension of the teaching practice of memorable teachers from the ethnographic record in the classrooms.
- 3 Numerous publications of the members of the GIEEC give account of the genesis of this category that comes from more than a decade ago, briefly we clarify that the ‘memorable teachers’ are those chosen by advanced students of teaching careers as examples of good teaching and diverse traits peculiar to their practices have been highlighted by students in a timely manner.
 - 4 The narrative piece corresponds to the recording of Cecilia’s participation in the “VII National Conference on Teacher Training” held in September 2013 at the National University of Mar del Plata, organized by the GIEEC (Research Group on Education and Studies Cultural) in the panel called “Conversation with four voices: Life, passion and teaching.”
 - 5 “Installation model” is an expression of Cecilia that appears in the biographical interview and also in the in-depth interview when she alludes to her pedagogical style, her way of understanding teaching and her way of teaching.
 - 6 This category was addressed in depth in: Porta, L. and Flores, G. (2014). “The teaching practices of memorable university professors. The student as an anthropological peer” in *Journal for Educators, Teachers and Trainers*, Vol 5 (2), 60-73. Spain, University of Granada. We offer here a very brief resignification.
 - 7 “Passionate teaching” is a macro-category of interpretive study that is not addressed in this space.
 - 8 The category that was addressed in Porta, L. and Flores, G. (2017) is briefly resignified. “Hospitality in memorable university professors” in *REXE Journal of Studies and Experiences in Education*, Vol. 16 No. 30, 15-31. Chile, Catholic University of the most Holy Conception.
 - 9 In the interpretative study, this idea is valid for the micro-space of the class, although the sociologist refers to the commitment with causes linked to the refugees, with situations of violation of rights, that is, he makes a generalization on a world scale.
 - 10 According to Breithaupt (2011), the discovery of mirror neurons gives weight to the hypothesis of intersubjective similarity as the foundation of empathy (p.59).



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Document receipt date: December 15, 2018

Document review date: February 20, 2019

Document approval date: April 25, 2019

Document publication date: July 15, 2019