Diálogos sobre Educación
TEMAS ACTUALES EN INVESTIGACIÓN EDUCATIVA

año 10 | número 19 | julio-diciembre 2019 | ISSN 2007-2171
Recibido: 07 de noviembre de 2018 | Aceptado: 06 de enero de 2019

Paradoxes in the educational discourse about discrimination: a disciplinary background?[1]

DOI: 10.32870/dse.v0i19.621

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Abstract

This paper analyzes paradoxes in the concrete and situated configuration of the legal principle of equality and non-discrimination, as well as the paradigm of respect for diversity through which conflicts about discrimination are addressed at school. With an ethnographic approach that privileges social categories and meanings over legal terms such as discrimination, it analyzes interpersonal relationships and the emotions that children verbalize. It starts by considering aspects of the state discourse on discrimination such as the legal approach to discriminatory acts and their tendency to constrain it to terms of treatment and attitudinal bias. These aspects are reconstructed in everyday practices and relationships in a public school in an impoverished neighborhood of Buenos Aires, where discrimination is systematically linked to individualizing matrices of meaning about children as students, and the paradoxical effects on the regulation of their discriminatory verbalizations. It concludes by reconstructing the tensions between the disciplinary background of educational discourse and the collective and historical demands against discrimination.

Key words: discrimination – educational discourse – disciplinary – ethnography

Introduction

In Argentina, 'discrimination' is both a legal and political category as well as a term used in everyday language. Its early appearance in the Law on Discriminatory Acts 23.592 of 1988 and its degree of institutionalization through a specific government agency, the National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism (INADI) may help explain its more frequent presence in everyday discourse than that of other political terms. In juridical language, 'discri-

1 This paper presents partial results of completed research work, the author's doctoral dissertation (2017), funded by Argentina's National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET).

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mination' refers to *actions* that infringe the principle of equality and the right not to be discriminated against (Gutiérrez Rivas, 2014). If the genealogy of the law against discrimination must necessarily be part of a series of norms and agreements within the international framework of human rights, the same can be said about the realm of education in Argentina in particular. Both the principle of equality and non-discrimination and respect for diversity are elements in the current universe of education for citizenship, as foundational mandates of public education (Siede, 2013). Thus, we underscore the fact that diversity and non-discrimination belong in the principles of the language of human rights, a political and juridical doctrine that takes shape within educational discourse. Historically, just two years after the norm was passed in 1988, the term was already present in the school discourse on diversity and children's rights (Siede, 2016).

Considering its early appearance and its degree of deployment as legitimate political discourse within schools – as attested by its hypervisibility in billboards, workshops, projects, posters – the paradigm of non-discrimination and its propositional counterpart, diversity, is especially polysemic in the school environment. In fact, it was possible to reconstruct this polysemy as a social category in place through an anthropological approach to the concepts of children's rights and migration (Martínez, 2017), and their links to the dynamics of interaction and the identifications situated in the school.

From this entire framework, we have privileged the reconstruction of the categories of perception of discrimination as aspects of practices and discourse in everyday life in the school. In this sense, the hypotheses presented here are the result of a triangulated analysis of multiple levels of the educational discourse (the curricula and other institutional documents, the teachers' discourse, everyday relationships). Following premises that have become pillars of juridical anthropology, we inquire about the concrete and situated configuration of the paradigms, seeking to go beyond the normative lens and the infringement/enforcement dichotomy of rights as a framework to analyze social reality (Fonseca & Schuch, 2009).

The empirical material analyzed here was the product of ethnographic research work[2] in a public elementary school whose students live mostly in one of the neighborhoods of southern Buenos Aires, with a significant proportion of migrant population.[3] During the research process,

2 Thirteen teachers and one of the administrators were interviewed there. We also worked with a group of children between the ages of 11 and 13 during their sixth (2012) and seventh (2013) grade of primary school. This paper is based on 21 classroom observations with the same group, in its interaction with six teachers (according to the area of teaching), and five theater improvisation with the seventh grade group. We also conducted 18 individual interviews and two group conversations with them. Besides that, from May to November 2013 we carried out ethnographic work in an educational support center within the same neighborhood attended by some of the children in this school. The names of the neighborhood, educational institutions and all participants have been changed to protect their anonymity.

3 Historically the rate of border migrants has remained as a steady and stable flow for a hundred years, between 2 % and 3.5 % of the country's population (Pacecca, 2010). Nowadays they make up 3.5 of the (overall) percentage of foreign-born within the total migrant population of the country, 4.5%. In the southern part of the city of Buenos Aires, and particularly in the specific area where we worked, the so-called Comuna 8, there are 40,863 Latin American migrants, most of whom are from bordering countries, i.e. 38,361, and 2,502 from non-bordering countries (Peru and others). Source: National Census of Population, Homesteads and Housing, 2010.

the questions about the category of discrimination gradually took shape through an approach to social categories and the documenting of "the not documented" through ethnography (Rockwell, 2011), descriptions of the teachers of their everyday work, perceptions of the families, the children and their interactions. In that sense, the overall methodological framework has responded to strategies typically associated with ethnography such as participant observation, open or not directed interviews and informal conversations (Guber, 2004). The field work was first organized by consulting broad descriptions of the conditions of life in the neighborhood at large, the meanings attributed to enrollment in the school, and the observation of interactions. We took into account the recurrence in the discourse of the actors of education and focused on the conceptions and practices of some of them in particular, through the triangulation of diverse situations and the follow-up to the same group of teachers and children in different situations.

We have also worked in triangulation with institutional documents and secondary sources about discrimination. What follows is the body of our work.

Discrimination in the school discourse. Dilemmas of adult and institutional approaches

The educational discourse: institutional biases and everyday dynamics

In conversations with the actors of education there are frequent descriptions and references to the conditions of structural inequality of the *villa* where the school is located.[4] However, 'discrimination' is not a category used often to describe the dynamics related to the inclusion of this population in school or to refer to the conditions of life for the migrant population, but it is mentioned when speaking about conflicts in interactions among children, and associated to categories of verbal aggression: "insults". It is only when we inquire about peer interaction when situations of aggression arise; that is, when a child uses a category to "brand" another child or uses a nationality in a derogatory way, such as "You Bolivian!"

It is worth mentioning that, besides making up 80% of the children who attend this school, this collectivity also faces particular dynamics of otherness in regard to a supposedly European and white hegemonic version of Argentina's national identity, which runs parallel in this sense to the historical disparagement and disavowal of the indigenous population (Grimson, 2006), although it has also been – especially in the last decade and a half – an identity category that has been reasserted and reclaimed in different processes of organization of these groups. A number of interactions we recorded in the school show this complexity of meanings, and fun-

4 Villas are informal settlements that concentrate severe levels of inequality and precariousness in general infrastructure, public services and economic status of their inhabitants. Taking different indicators into account, this situation has worsened significantly after the change of government in 2015 (Martínez, 2017). Likewise, this change has brought with it legal and political measures that have criminalized migrants, although the Migratory Law 25.871 of 2004, with a human rights approach, is still the legal framework in place at the time this paper was written in October 2018.

damentally the way in which the children identified as Bolivian – many of them born in Argentina – are also "branded" through markers such as the way in which they speak Spanish or the color of their skin. When listening to the description to these interactions, notions somewhat ambiguous or "misunderstood" by the adults can be noticed: "He/She is calling you a Bolivian, what is the 'problem'?", as well as the certainty that children addressed this way do not generally respond to such discourse.

There are also repeated discursive associations with the disciplinary parameter, like the hinge between the expected and the disruptive in the children's behavior. They are inextricable from the identification of some children as "problematic", and these in turn involve a reference to the figure of the families. In conflicts between peers, discrimination is then referred to with interpersonal relationship categories. Discrimination is deployed as a term that names relationships whose conflictive nature imposes "observables", that is, aspects that can be perceived directly (gestures and/or discourses of rejection, violent physical interaction, segregation or distancing). This focus, in the sense of interpersonal interaction it adopts, may also explain exclusively local uses of discrimination, such as when the school's principal told us that "little blond ones are also discriminated against", or when the educational support teachers described negative images of Bolivians in the neighborhood about Argentinians: "in the neighborhood, it is the Argentinians who are discriminated against".

On the one hand, discrimination as a category in interpersonal interactions seems to owe part of its weight to a juridical approach that tends to limit it to inequality in individual interaction and not as a structural inequality between groups and social, i.e., status, positions (Gutiérrez Rivas, 2014). We also recorded points of connection between some constant features in the social uses of discrimination and ahistorical modes that the term adopts in institutional discourse. A paradigmatic case is the hyper-circulation of the category of 'bullying', which has gained an important position in institutional discourse about discrimination addressed to children and teenagers. Centered on harassment among school and age peers, 'bullying' refers to acts of interpersonal violence at a different level (verbal, physical, psychological). It has become a synonym because discrimination is increasingly seen as inequality in treatment. It is not a question of interpretation, but of how literal the definitions are. In the document drafted jointly by UNICEF and INADI, it is claimed that "If someone discriminates against anyone, that person does not share", "What is discrimination? Discrimination is any kind of unequal treatment or mistreatment of any person or group" (UNICEF/INADI, 2016:7), linking it to digital discrimination (especially in social networks). On page 10, they clearly state that bullying and cyberbullying are the main focus of the document: discrimination is replaced by bullying as a synonym.

It is in this context that new verbs appear also in the classrooms, as described by some teachers: *bulinear* (bullying) or *ser bulineado* (being bullied). This reference to a form of treatment is omnipresent in many other documents to define discrimination: sometimes directly as

treatment or mistreatment (INADI, 2016a), other times associating discrimination to violence (INADI 2016b), and in general echoing the juridical definition of discrimination as an action (INADI, 2011; 2016c). However, there are some inequalities in treatment that refer to positions in the social structure (such as that of migrants) and others that do not. We must point out the fact that not every act of de violence between peers (or persons) reproduces social relationships of power, a political aspect that creates a divide. However, it is not at the center of what we analyzed in the interactions among children in the school. The reasons for the prominence of bullying and its camouflage as a synonym of discrimination are to be found in the bases of meaning that make it possible, i.e. that precede the introduction of this category: what has become generalized is a reduction of discrimination to the interpersonal, which becomes especially powerful in schools.

We also find in institutional discourse another bias linked to interpersonal relationships as the axis of discrimination: the so-called attitudinal aspects, the appeal to values, behavior and attitudes of treatment to others. The tendency to equal conceptual and attitudinal concepts had already been pointed out by Novaro fifteen years ago (2002) for the contents of the curricula about discrimination. The current curricula contents in the city of Buenos Aires show that this bias is still in place, albeit with precisions of greater juridical rigor (Martínez, 2017).

We underscore the fact that the interweaving between the persuasion of behavior and political analysis is not restricted to educational discourse, since the language of the State also falls into that kind of concealment. This can be seen in recent documents that invite the reader to learn about an "intercultural Argentina" through the visibilization of the contributions of historically invisible groups in Argentina such as indigenous peoples, migrants or people of African descent. "Adopting the intercultural paradigm implies losing the fear to meet, to interact with other groups, having a dialog, learning to listen and to build together with those that we regard as different" (INADI, 2013; 2016a). We notice here that an elaborate critical, historical and apparently anti-racist – although very recent and with very little effect on the social discourse – reflection is placed in a chain of equivalence with an attitudinal persuasion of regulation of communicative styles. We believe that this discourse operation must necessarily have pedagogical consequences. As a concept, dialog hinders an understanding of diversity as a democratization process. Used in explanations of racism and interculturality, it provides a whitewash that mixes the critique of hegemonic versions of "white" Argentinian society with a moral persuasion of conduct towards the others. Having established some problematic biases at the level of institutional discourse, we will now address their "operativeness" in the day-to-day dimension of the school, and specifically on the ways to process conflicts named as discrimination.

Interpersonal treatment and the children's political position

According to the descriptions of discriminatory acts and what we have recorded so far, the weight of the utterance "children call each other…" is undeniable. This utterance becomes omni-

present especially in the classroom, which compared to other spaces for interaction within the school "is a reality made up of words" (Díaz de Rada, 2008). But there is also a sensitive, sensorial dimension – smells, visual impressions, sound uttered or heard, approaching or distancing gestures – that cannot be separated from everything that is verbalized inside and outside the classrooms: in this case, it is a continuous sequence of non-verbal aspects that are verbalized. In general, the intelligibility of exchanges in the school relies on a vocabulary of the children's emotions: anxiety, anger, shame.

The presence of emotions in the interpretation of these facts is inescapable in the physical proximity of the children, the observables of suffering with whom the teachers have to deal every day, faced with severe family and social issues in these contexts. One of the teachers told me in great detail the experience of a child in seventh grade whose mother (a migrant) had been sentenced to ten years in prison for having been a "mule" (an illegal drug courier). "When the children call her *transa* ("crook") she cries uncontrollably; she is a very sensitive girl". Claiming or silencing belonging is referred to with different verbs of interpersonal treatment such as *bardear, joder, molestar*, *cargar* ("bother"). In all the cases, both for the adults and for the children, words are at the center: "they call each other/they are called…" To start, we want to situate the institutional understanding of the utterances interpreted as *discrimination* in the level of verbalizations, interpersonal treatment and emotional effects (gestural, corporals, expressive like crying of physical confrontation) perceived in the exchanges between the children.

There is a local accumulation of records of this type of interactions that makes the scenes described by the teachers very representative: "'Shut up, Bolivian', the child said very naturally", "Get out, don't touch me, you'll get me all stinky". The odor, the rejection, the derogatory images used against peers are part of this "archive" on the experience of discrimination at school that ethnographic approaches have been recording in Buenos Aires for at least twenty years. These experiences, deployed in situations of physical proximity, are practices between children in which "the body of the other is altered with symbolic violence" (Neufeld & Thisted, 1999). On the other hand, studies in other countries in the region and even in Central America or Colombia lead us to believe that the conditions exist to see these processes comparatively: in these contexts discrimination also has to do with verbalizations of compulsive heterodesignation about skin color, self-perceptions and rejections, power relationships around collective conditions in which the children place themselves (the national or white 'us') or conversely, see themselves as outsiders.[5] There are verbal exchanges that can only be understood by assuming the racial register, the way in which the children see their own skin color or that of their classmate, observable aspects that show themselves as covert racial slurs, in a seemingly jocular way, as we

5 Whether in the schooling of children of African descent in Bogotá (Soler Castillo, 2013), Peruvian children in Chile (Pavez Soto, 2012) or Colombian children in Quito, Ecuador (Sánchez Bautista, 2013), discriminatory interaction seem to have a content at least similar to the one recorded here, specifically in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires.

have recorded Leo say multiple times in the classroom: "Quiet, negro". Here we must explain that Leo is white (part of the "little blond ones", as the principal told me, although his hair is brown); Ramiro, Adrián and Carlos, children of Bolivians, have darker skin, as well as Simón, whom Leo has addressed several times as "brown". But it is known that there are other aspects that denote their belonging to the school, such as their different pronunciation of Spanish, which is more marked in some children, like Alina, than in others.

> [We are in the Math class, and I am practicing fractions with Eduardo]
> Leo: Simón, look, this is you, brown! [He shows him a jar of instant coffee on the teacher's desk. Simón responds, but I do not hear his answer].
> [Alina answers the teacher's question aloud, with a pronunciation that Leo finds very nasal, and mocks a high-pitched voice squeezing his nose]
> Teacher: What are you doing, Leo?
> Eduardo: He is discriminating her [because of] how she speaks.
> Another child: He is disrespecting her.
> Teacher: What are you doing, Leo? [in a disapproving tone]
> Leo: I am teaching her to speak … [laughs]
> Teacher: We are all different; some of us speak faster, others more slowly […] I cannot pronounce the 'rr' […] my students don't laugh, just like I don't laugh at the children who can't do some things … we all have different voices.
> Carlos: Teach, it's already forty past [time for recess]
> Teacher: I want one of you to reflect on what we said. Who wants to say something? [no one volunteers] Eduardo is going to tell us what he thinks…
> Eduardo: [pretends to take a microphone to give a speech, and laughingly, but with a solemn face] Compatriots…
> Teacher: [trying to close, before they go out for recess] Is it OK to mock someone? No…
>
> Recorded in class, October 5 2012.

Beyond classroom observation or exchanges with children and teachers in this space, many of our insights arise from our follow-up of situations of interaction in a theater improvisation workshop as well as informal group and individual conversations with a small group of children, in particular when addressing the uses of the category *discrimination* to name situations of conflict performed by the children where foreigners – Bolivians in particular – were expelled from jobs. While some of them, like Leo, Pamela and Alberto, displayed discourses of exclusion against foreigners, children of migrants like Ramiro who played the scene became involved in arguments and conflicts offstage with the rest, finally withdrawing from the group.

The relationship between the polysemy of discrimination as a social category in use and the way that the children construct interpretations around it has been analyzed in detail in previous research (Martínez, 2017; 2018), where we discussed specifically the traces of knowledge and psychological matrices of meaning in the children's elaborations of the discriminatory events in the school. In fact, the school's discourse on discrimination, as noted by human rights organizations (APDH/INADI, 2010) takes shape molded particularly by an expert psychological view on the emotional effect on the children.[6] At this point we must remember that the "psy" lens is not concerned only with expert knowledge in the school environment but has also become conventional wisdom about childhood (Llobet, 2013). Thus, ethnographic research has allowed us to reconstruct the sistematicity of the keys of individualizing interpretation on facts that children and teachers name as discriminatory, and the conditionings implied for the elaborations constructed by children in this institutional context (Martínez, 2017; 2018). Insofar as such matrices of meaning emphasize the relationships of treatment at the level of *physical proximity* between the children in the instances of discrimination, we believe it is important to make their *physical proximity* the object of our analysis.

Particularly in school, as an institutional space for children, physical and material closeness is also an institutional–political proximity for students as age peers. To start with, emphasizing the institutional position of children in school is relevant to understand the specific scope that the terms and discourses on diversity (such as differences or respect) have there, intertwined as they are with institutional positions and relationships.

In Argentina, the democratization of the treatment towards children is a process linked first to the redefinitions of the school's institutional guidelines in the return to democracy. The introduction of the children's rights language in the late 1980s accompanied a moment of redefinition of institutional paradigms, while the passing of the law on childhood was implied in guidelines that can now be seen in the curricula: notions of treatment by adults, democratic models of authority and discipline. The categories of *coexistence*, *respect*, and *dialogue* are now pillars of the democratic language through which the school processes, and promotes positions on, conflicts.

> [The boys laugh and talk loudly while the teacher is trying to explain. She is interrupted twice by laughter and other sounds. When it happens again, she says]
> Teacher: Whoever does not want [to listen] will leave. I don't want anyone outside. Do you know what studying is? It is a right. It is a right that you have, the right to learn. Respect your classma-

6 It is worth mentioning that the new Law Against Discrimination of the City of Buenos Aires, 5261/15, in its Article 3 Section c, includes this emotional dimension on the repercussions of discrimination in the characterization of such acts: "Behavior that aims to cause emotional harm or lowered self-esteem, harm and/or disturb the full personal and/or identity development, degrade, stigmatize, or any other behavior that causes damage to a person's psychological health and self-determination under any discriminatory pretext".

tes, it is their right too. It is their right to learn.
[She repeats it several times. The boys stop laughing, but they are still distracted. The teacher finishes reading and goes over the main points with the children.
Leo comes and sits next to me. I signal him to sit next to me]
Researcher: What did the teacher mean when she said that studying is your right?
Leo: She meant that it is great to study.
Researcher: Your right… what does she mean by that?
Leo: That we have to study to be someone when we grow up.
Researcher: But, "right"... What does that word mean?
Lucas: That we have to study... As an obligation.
[The teacher continues]
Teacher: Can we pass this into writing activities?
Children, as a chorus: Noooooo.
Teacher: Take out your Language binder. [She starts to copy something on the board].
[I move closer to Yanet, remind her of the episode with the teacher… She does not seem to recall it very well. I repeat what she said and ask her the same question I asked Leo, and she says].
Yanet: That you have to behave and study.
[I go back to my desk. I am sitting with Manuel, Jorge, Simón and Adrián. I ask them about the situation with the teacher: What does it mean to say that studying is a right?]
Adrián: That when the teacher gives us something we have to respect her.
Simón: That we can study if we want.
[In the middle of this one of the boys tells another one "To keep from being a dunce". They exchange laughs].
Researcher: And if we say "Have the right to go to the doctor"…
Simón: That they have to see you free of charge.
Otro: That you have to go.
Simón: That no one can say anything to you.
Ramiro: [Because] We have the right to study and have a degree when we grow up.

Recorded in class, October 4 2012.

What interests us in this fragment is not the pedagogical discussion on democratic language as a form of authority but the situational and positional meaning that some categories of perception of what happens in the school, such as respect, adopt for the children. In exchanges with them, the right to study appears repeatedly, intercrossed by multiple sides: the relationship between will and ability (wanting and being able to), institutional interactions that can be embodied in a familiar example ("that *they* have to see you free of charge"), the promotional

narrative ("being someone" and becoming a professional). In most of them there is a rather automatic note of interpretation towards the sense of obligatory, but also of deserving it. This interweaving with the obligatory must be seen as a social convention: the ability that a right grants to an individual and what becomes an obligation for the children ("what the teacher says, that it is our obligation to study", etc.). Taking into account the fact that respect, for example, is one of the terms deployed in school experiences and in the institutional discourse itself, it is crucial to acknowledge its specific resonances relative to the political position of children in this institutional environment.

We believe that the interweaving between the democratic language of the school and its "necessarily" disciplinary side is particularly problematic for the complex understanding of discrimination as a social and structural phenomenon, its intersections and distance from what actually happens with the children in the school, that is, among subjects with the same political position.

At the same level of analysis of communicative interactions, we must place the question about the *conditions of possibility* that the experiences of (mis)treatment as migrants or children of migrants in the school become associated to social/structural inequalities toward this group. As we have reconstructed in situations of conflict in the theater workshop, children of migrants like Ramiro show political contestation in a scene where a migrant is faced with a labor dispute with a company, but such contestation does not appear when performing the everyday actions of his peers in school, which were consistently linked to violations of discipline and a disruptive family biography (Martínez, 2017; 2018). However, this matrix of intelligibility of school discrimination becomes a key for interpretation that is also appropriated by the mothers of children who are violently discriminated against,[7] as in the narrative of a Bolivian woman of what her child tells her, sadly, about what happens in the school. When the adults "copy" (repeat) what the children say, it becomes clear how inequalities and hierarchies embedded in social, economic and cultural structures are experienced since childhood: racism, the material subordination of border migrants,[8] the denial of national membership to children of Bolivians.

> "Mom, why was I born like this? Why do they call me Bolivian if I am Argentinian?" The children who tease him say: "You were born to serve me".
> The woman tells me that in this situation she believes that it is important "to tell them about where they came from, that they value and acknowledge … [that they have] respect for their origin".

7 A common acquaintance, a relative of these people, had introduced me as someone who worked on the discrimination at the school, since this woman sought orientation about what was happening to her son in an elementary school in the south of the City of Buenos Aires, a different jurisdiction from the one where we conducted our work.

8 A few months before, in October 2015, during a conference in the University of Buenos Aires, the representative of an organization of Young Bolivian migrants recalled hearing children of Bolivian descent being called "slaves" in a school in Flores, City of Buenos Aires.

When I ask her why she thinks this happens with the children, she tells me about the chaotic family environment (that they already know who discriminates against them); although "speaking with the parents" would be a possibility.

Conversation at a Courthouse. Waiting for the beginning of the Trial for Luis Viale's Textile Workshop.[9] April 18 2016.

A conventional wisdom notion can be recognized in the opinions of both the teachers and the migrant parents: the attribution of aggressive or derogatory remarks is assumed to be a "copy" of behavior incorporated within the family. There is a disciplinary lens through which they think about what the children say or do, from the key of the family biography that nourishes these classifications of the students. It is clearly noticeable that these aspects may also be present in the academic discourse on this issue, where categories of analysis from the school system are reproduced (López, 2011).

The assumption that what the children say and do is a copy of what the adults referred to also do recalls the interpersonal notion of discrimination, in the shape of verbal acts or practices. But it is also a generalized interpretation used to interpret the different forms of distress expressed by the children in the school. Here we have the traces of a way to interpret the reproduction of family violence in the subject's new links, typical of the "psy" matrix (Llobet, 2011). Again, it is a horizon of interpersonal treatment and violence, accessible to direct perception. It is not surprising that it is in the school where discrimination is masked specifically with features of invidualization, arbitrariness, violence coming from outside the subject.

Sandra: At the beginning of the year we had a lot of discrimination among them, but [later] we made a lot of progress in human issues. You can't imagine how it was at the beginning, "Shut up, Bolivian. Get out, don't touch me, you'll get me all stinky". All the same, do you know how we rebuked this kid's aggression? "You be quiet, Aguayo: where does your last name comes from?" He was speechless.
Researcher: And where does it come from?
Sandra: Sometimes you have to be like that. I don't know where that discrimination he has comes from.
Researcher: No, I mean the last name.
Sandra: Well, it seems to me… It sounds Bolivian to me, Aguayo […]

Interview with Sandra, Sixth grade teacher. October 9 2013.

9 In an iconic case of the work exploitation of the migrant population, a fire in a workshop in the south of the City of Buenos Aires in 2006 killed five children and a pregnant woman.

Besides the masking of the social issue of discrimination, we can interpret in this exchange something that helps us understand the persistence of the attitudinal persuasion bias in this issue, and this is that it does not clash with what is clearly still present in the school among the educators themselves: the hierarchical structuring of difference (ethnic, racial, national, of social class), as well as the fact that the observation that the children's verbalizations are modified "with the passage of time", after sustained interventions by the educators, has been made to us repeatedly.

In this regard it is important to point out that the individualizing view is complemented by the attitudinal bias that starts at the institutional documents themselves. The polysemy extends – not coincidentally – to some terms linked to this democratic language: *respect*, as a term associated to school regulations, also goes in the opposite direction to the one given to it by migrants – or their children in school – when faced with these conflicts. For migrants, respect has to do with having a right in conditions of equality, or claiming an origin or belonging. In the everyday interactions of the school, respect has specific resonances relative to the position of authority: it actually condensates unspoken effects of verbal censorship.

The linkage of diversity to an attitudinal plane has a displacement effect that can also be traced to what we have mentioned about institutional discourse. This problem stems from mixing highly political historical ideas against the official "White Argentina" with sweetened appeals to openness and listening to the other. The risk is that discrimination becomes encapsulated as a fact in the (individualized) practice towards the others, and not as the internalization of relationships of power. Pedagogical thinking must ask how criticizing a way of treating the others is linked (or not) to a social criticism of the system. In the latter case, it could be argued that moral judgement of the harm done to the other and the basic bifurcation between good and evil is articulated to the intelligibility of a power relationship.

The internalization of hierarchies does not always translate into actions. In our field work we have revealed many situations when "discriminatory" actions are centered in a group of boys and the girls who usually accompany them. Deliberately, several girls (like Sandra, Alina and Sonia) asked to have workshops *among girls* and chose as topic of discussion, based on the same issue, *women*. There they spoke about *neighbors*, bringing up children, and the experiences of a group of *friends*. In such environments of interaction it was clear that there were no slurs as the ones we found in many situations; that is, analyzing class and national slurs in the school has led us necessarily to pay attention to what the children *do and say*. There is then a plane of the enactment, the "display" of verbalizations whose protagonists are the boys. However, the internalization of hierarchies about foreigners may run parallel to what is considered suitable for the plane of interpersonal treatment.

Researcher: Well, I remember that one of the characters who played a foreigner said "I'm going to file a complaint for discrimination".
Pamela: Of course, he filed a complaint because we did not want him there, that's why. We, the company, couldn't do anything if those were the orders they gave us […]. Researcher: And the foreigner, how does he know that he has to file a complaint?
Pamela: He must have heard it, he must have filed another complaint, or somebody must have told him "Go to the police and file a complaint".
Researcher: And the police, how do they know that they have to investigate his complaint?
Pamela: Because it is a right, I think. We shouldn't fire foreigners, supposedly.
Researcher: […] because you said that they must not be fired because it's a right, but all the same the man…
Pamela: The man may have wanted to go to another country, and since he didn't have a job, they wouldn't let him... and he may have done the same.
[…]
Researcher: And is it like that for you?
Pamela: Well, they shouldn't come here... not because I'm bad […] it's because I don't like it... they should go to their country.
Researcher: You say "not because I'm bad […]". Did someone tell you that?
Pamela: Yes… they say I'm bad because I say that.
Researcher: What makes a person bad?
Pamela: I say that, but then I regret it because I'm not going to say "go back to your country" because he would feel bad, and if I say that I'm bad.

Interview with Pamela. December 6 2013.

It becomes clear that denying foreigners their rights is not a matter of lack of information about the current laws. The prescription as a social convention "We must not kick them out" is complemented by a category that marks a distance from that prescription, *supposedly*. Pamela's position about her peers who feel bad when she is bad – that is, when she says what she feels about foreigners – followed the conflicts and exchanges that took place after a workshop with the researcher. Her words echo what she had discussed with her peers and with the adult about the emotional effect of the situation on Ramiro, son of migrants who left angrily – "*con bronca*", he said – when he heard verbalizations that discriminated against foreigners, and then kept his distance from his peers for a few days. However, later in the interview Pamela added that not even the foreigner's children – even those born in Argentina – deserve to be in the school, but that she does not say that either because she does not want to be bad and to make them feel bad. It is important to reflect on the gap that seems to appear between the verbalization that is

regarded as unsuitable for interpersonal treatment and the stubborn persistence of the national hierarchy, which the girl considers legitimate to apply even to her own age peers and their right to schooling.

In the interviews we went over the dilemma arising from the scene in the workshop. All the children of migrants uphold, as a result of the conflictive situation of the workshop that I showed them, a sort of "collective subject": a *group* of foreigners who make a claim, a *march*, a *protest*. In one case we encountered a suggestive level of argumentation and claim of rights. Among all the claims that Sonia made in the interviews – about Evo Morales's government, about defending your rights in marches and demonstrations – one that stood out was her right to live in Argentina because she herself is a migrant, and she also linked the theater performance in the workshop with the arbitrariness of instances of discrimination.

> Researcher: I'll tell you what happens in the scene. One of the workers says: "I'm going to file a complaint for discrimination".
> Sonia: Discrimination because they don't want to give a job to a foreigner […]. Let's just say an Argentinian and then a Bolivian, let's say. They examine both of them, and both are at the same level for the job, right? But they choose the Argentinian first, they don't want to give the job to the Bolivian […].
>
> Interview with Sonia. December 2 2013.

It is difficult to find in Sonia's words any trace of the general tone (there are always exception) with which nationalities are discussed as a conflict in the school. What we usually find as arbitrary there is the hierarchy shown in the children's words: "What is the problem?" In contrast, Sonia's argument is clear: nationality is used arbitrarily as a criterion against a Bolivian who is "at the same level" – compared to an Argentinian – for a job. This use of argumentation about the arbitrariness of nationality as a political mechanism runs against the current of what is repeatedly said from the school when the children enact derogatory or mocking slurs. It seems to be an elaboration built on the framework of their trajectory *outside* school, recalling too that her mother is a member of a territorial organization. How the nexus is reconstructed between the discrimination in the school and what is understood politically about it as a social fact is a truly relevant question about the views of the children of migrants. Because although views about rights over foreigners are expressed – as Alina also seems to claim – this is not linked to positions on instances of discrimination similar to the ones she experiences in the school.

Researcher: And for you, what would be the right way? How should it be? Suppose, you have to decide how the scene ends: "No, but we want to work", and the company: "No, here only Argentinians"
Alina: Well, in that situation one of the workers in the company can intervene and say "We need another worker to do the work".
Researcher: Ah, well! But imagine that the owner of the company says "No, the requirement is [that he is] Argentinian".
Alina: Sometimes the boss would be wrong, because he doesn't like to be with people from other countries. Then it would be wrong.
Researcher: How do you know it's wrong?
Alina: Because, I don't know. I had a black friend and everybody began to make fun of him. And for that reason other times I didn't want to be with strange people.
Researcher: What do strange people look like?
Alina: I don't know, a Chinese person with slanted eyes. Or a black person from Africa or Brazil, or because a person speaks in English and one can't understand him… and Spaniards are also strange […] because they pronounce a lot of zeds when and things like that [when they speak].
Researcher: That's when the company says no because they are not Argentinians. Is there something that can be done like […]? What should be their reaction?
Alina: Well, they could plan a group of foreigners and tell the government "We don't have a job and you do" […] that, demonstrate so they give them another job.

Interview with Alina, December 5 2013.

Somehow, she speaks in third person about things that concern her directly: Alina's way to speak Spanish is frequently mocked by her peers, her eyes are slightly slanted and her skin is dark, and because of this features she is identified as Bolivian although she was born in Argentina. She speaks in third person about instances similar to the ones that happen to her in school. At first, this could be interpreted as not accepting for herself the description that she makes of someone who is "strange" for Argentinians. It is important to note that her positioning seems to validate, or at least not to challenge, the inequality with which black people are treated. That is not aligned with xenophobic discourse, because in principle she says that foreigners may demand a job that is denied to them. "Being wrong" is the same category of perception for two facts: excluding a foreigner from a job and segregating two black people. But if at first it is the boss denying the job who is wrong, when she refers to being wrong as what those who exclude peers (a black friend) do, the person excluded is "strange", and she validates segregation and distancing. What was wrong in the situation that she associated with an(other) act of exclusion

is displaced: "I didn't want to be with strange people". Alina's position differs from exclusion positions through an archetypal social form against migrants, but that does not translate into a position about instances closer to her, more "archetypal", of what she experiences in school.

Going back to *interpersonal treatment* and *emotional impact* as constituents of the instances described as discrimination allows us to notice that these aspects can be generalized to any type of conflict and power relationships among children at school. What should be the divide is that only some conflicts between peers reproduce social relationships of power, not all of them. For this reason, the more discrimination conflicts are unified around "internal" rules of coexistence (saturated with discipline), the less the relationships and distances between institutional experiences and social processes can be made pedagogically clear.

It is crucial to realize that there are aspects of the "institutional code" to interpret what the students say that not only saturate the interpretations about the children who discriminate against others, but also the emotions, reactions and demands of those who are discriminated against. An educational environment such as the "school support" in the neighborhood is fraught with differences and distances regarding several issues related to school, a degree of acknowledgement of the place of migrants in society, etc. Nevertheless, discrimination as a fact among children is associated with a similar universe of meanings: individualization, equivalence of adjectives.

> Federica: [addressing the group] I want to bring something up. Ana wants to share something and … Would you like to tell us?
> Analía: I was in church and I fell to the floor… I felt that god spoke to me in tongues… I was free [...]. When I went to sleep it freed me from the anxiety I felt over what they say to me in school [because] they call me ciruja[10]… [she looks at Lucas, who is sitting next to Juan and the other boys in the group] I am talking to you, Lucas, because I'm an Evangelical.
> [Lucas looks down, no one speaks. Silence]
> Federica: Sorry… Regardless of whether one shares it or not [the religion], is it right to laugh if someone is different […]? Someone who wears glasses… or someone who says "Hey, you, Bolivian"…
> Juan: Yeah, yes, I am. Nobody treats me like that!
> Federica: Hey…
> Mariela: It's very meaningful, what Ana said, [being able to speak about] what caused her anxiety…
> Federica: Some people work out their anxiety by playing football […] or painting… What do you do when you feel anxiety? [several comments at the same time] Has anybody ever hidden under their bed…?
>
> Observation of "ronda" class at School Support, August 26 2013.

10 A term that could be translated as "garbage scavenger" (Editor's Note).

The anxiety felt by Analía,[11] a poor girl who is called a *ciruja* by her peers, is linked to a beautified notion of discrimination at school, where wearing glasses helps to refer patronizingly to the children called *cirujas* or *bolivianos* as "different". It is especially relevant to observe how the emotion verbalized by Analía translates into an abstract anxiety that can be generalized to any other: "What do you do when you feel anxiety?" In the experiences in the school, the insults and reactions to signs of verbal violence against migrants and/or poor people, biographical aspects are interwoven with their position in society. Whereas in many situations in the school we have also recorded the way in which adults[12] tend to equate the adjectives used by the (*gordo* [fatso], *dientón* [buck tooth], *boliviano*), the complexity of the children's experience, however, condensates the reaction to a personal, family and at the same time collective insult: it resonates on multiple senses of belonging at once.

This way of translating emotions, in this context, becomes the complement of the neutralization of the political aspect of the effects on the children, of their discomfort and experiences. A possible way to understand this kind of politically ambiguous exchanges that go so far as to deny what is known of the environment is *the child to whom one speaks* in pedagogical interactions: how a certain cut-out image of "universal" child is projected in the very moment when one speaks to them (Martínez, 2017), when nevertheless one hears their demands as children who do not fit that idealized figure.

In an attempt to learn what it would be to listen to the children's emotions in a different way, we must point out that another aspect of the group conversation analyzed is how Analía's statement about being an Evangelical is interpreted. We believe it is crucial to inquire about the resource that this symbolic framework is offering to a "poor" child who had just voiced her discomfort at being called a *ciruja* in the school, to listen to that discursive association between what she does not want to be (called) and the assertion of "being" something: "because I am an Evangelical". In tune, Juan responds confrontationally after being called a Bolivian: "yes, that's me". On the plane of the interactions, heterodesignation does not always take the form of a slur, which is what is seen as a "politically incorrect" verbal act. Political heterodesignations carry with them meanings that go beyond this style of verbal exchange. They cannot be boiled down to a compulsive interaction; rather, they imply meanings that are constructed and (re)produced through the pronunciation of a verb that is generalized: *ser* ("be"). Being someone through a profession, which we have reconstructed as a socially widespread rhetoric, is not the only way in which *ser* is verbalized. In fact, this rhetoric is more likely to be displayed in front of an adult, because its institutional legitimacy is recognized, but it is not necessarily limited to that. Throughout our field work we have revealed the complexity of these verbalizations about what one "is"

11 Analía was born in Argentina, and her parents are Argentinian. She is 12 years old.

12 Including ourselves, which we have analyzed by reflecting on the overlapping between teaching research and intervention in the spaces of the theater improvisation workshop (Martínez, 2017).

(es) in the context of different kinds of interactions between the children. When we heard in the classroom that some children were harassed by telling them that they sold bread, Adrián would explain "It is because their mother is poor". Or in the schoolyard, discussing in a group with the researcher, when Ramiro's solid arguments about a criminal case were received with comments of approval and/or admiration by his peers: "Well, you can study to be a policeman", Carlos suggested. Also, in the context of one of the theater improvisation workshops, there were exchanges around being a *boliviano* but also around other identification categories such as *indio*.

> In the schoolyard, Amanda and Pamela are sitting with other children, "spectators" looking at Ramiro and Eduardo. They exchange giggles and jokes while they wait for the "actors" to start speaking. Amanda and Pamela talk to Ramiro, and Amanda asks him *¿vos sos indio?* [Are you an indian?] (They laugh).
>
> Workshop Record 04/11/13

In Spanish, *ser* – like *estar* and *parecer* – is a copulative verb; these are verbs that establish a nominal predicate of the subject, i.e. that make the attribute (of the verbal predicate) equivalent with the subject.[13] *Ser* is present in the communicative interactions of the children, and what helps to understand the sense of the political heterodesignations is their being part of a broader flow of identifications and positions, the negotiation, appropriation or dispute among what one is, what one must/wants to be, and what one must not/does not want to be.

The paradoxes in the situated configuration of the non-discrimination principle: a disciplinary background?

The axis of the events called *discrimination* in the school acquires a centrally verbal character: an inequality in the public positions on the category of identity (national, racial, of class, etc.) between those who use it as a compulsive identification, sometimes even as hate language, and those who are at the receiving end of it: what becomes systematic in the contexts of interaction is the asymmetry between the forms of pronunciation. If anything, what we have recorded in the comparative analysis of verbal interactions among the children is that the meanings displayed about being a foreign person are inseparable from the performative effect they generate in the power relationships among peers. But the contents of the slurs is neither true nor false (Butler, 1998); it is a heterodesignation whose effect is associated to the meaning that can be installed over a category. The compulsive heterodesignations among the children carry the effect

13 The Real Academia Española's definition of copulative verb can be found online: http://www.rae.es/diccionario-panhispanico-de-dudas/terminos-linguisticos

of showing the negative senses loaded on an identification category. However, perceptions of differences cannot be reduced to this style of verbalization, but rather imply questions and dilemmas about what one *is*, and what one does not want/must not be. This does not imply in a linear way disassociations but also appropriations and assertions, such as Juan's "yes, that's me".

Nevertheless, in the school adult discourse superimpose terms of experience on the relationships of treatment – such as respect, coexistence, mockery, for example – over the categories of perception of the *differences* (such as accent, skin) *in their social and historical hierarchical structuring*, such as those perceptions constructed on the association of dark or brown skin and being an "indian" (which could be thought of in terms of the relationship between AM and FM radio frequencies). The possibility of linking these institutional meanings to social relationships of inequality depends on the volume given to thinking about *structurally* discriminatory instances, underscoring the fact that the children's verbalizations are *linked to,* but not *equivalent* to them.

As we have pointed out, this volume is diluted between the ambiguous meanings and the attitudinal–disciplinary processing of the facts, so the verbal record of the propositions and the attitudinal persuasion is fundamentally adult. At this point, superposition as a lack of tuning is also mediated by positions and relationships of authority, which begs the question of whether in some situations what is installed with the propositional phrases is "respect" or others about interpersonal treatment (like *not mocking*) faced with discriminatory experiences is an effect of regulation of the verbalization practices over the hierarchy of differences – that, we must insist, are not always discriminatory. Phrases that we have recorded in adult communication towards children in discriminatory conflict situations (such as "we are all different") do not interact pedagogically with the meanings of the children but reproduce the institutional version of equality. In particular, *differences* acquire a situated, disciplinary meaning, as a response to verbal practices of discrimination, that is, they are not equivalent to the meaning that *the different* adopts in general in everyday verbal interactions in the school, where it is a comparative and not a propositional term (for example, in classes that we have observed where the teacher compared labor legislation in different moments of history saying "it was different before"). The verbalization of differences in their materiality (the "brown" blacks, for example), arise from "ready-made comparisons", differences that have already been registered by the children. The issue here is the hierarchy between what is compared, the power relationship between the differences. Prescriptions of what *we all are* do not seem to touch this political fiber of diversity, nor do they connect with the verbalization of *ser* ["being"] in the situated communicative interactions of the children. As propositional definitions, they detach the differences – what one is or does not want to be – from their performative meaning, the effect of "showing" social hierarchies. In such propositional phrases, the institutional verbalization of what one *is* places diversity and rights within the order of the juridical fiction of equality, blurring its intelligibility as a demand of democratization and social critique.

We must remember that this overlapping between the linguistic categories of treatment and those having to do with slurs over categories of identification takes place in an institutional context that deploys with some systematicity keys to interpret discrimination as instances among students: psychological knowledge, norms of institutional treatment and coexistence. This leads us to raise a question about the existence of a disciplinary background of the discourse against discrimination and the respect of diversity in the school. In principle, this hypothesis offers a suggestive explanation to a fact that, because of its being so evident, goes unnoticed: of all the strategies deployed in our field work, we had no record of children who solve argumentatively their conflicts with their peers around discrimination through the institutional categories of diversity (*differences, respect, coexistence*). Since there is so much talk about how discriminatory slurs have to do with what the children repeat, we must ask what is that they do not want to repeat from the adults and from institutional discourse. Deliberately, this well-meaning discourse of difference is not appropriated by migrant children and children of migrants. Its adult key, tacitly disciplinarian and politically ambiguous, is precisely what prevents the children from being able to incorporate differences into some kind of political contestation. While the lack of conditions for migrant children and children of migrants relate what happens in the school with the processes being experienced by the collective (Novaro, 2011) has been raised, we believe that part of this has to do with the categories of perception available for discriminatory experiences at school, since they are deeply interwoven with the institutional codes of individualized treatment for the students.

This background also runs through and conditions the listening to the emotions and experiences expressed by the children. The disciplinary background conceals two significant aspects: that these emotions experienced in the school environment in childhood may be linked to memories of insults and collective elaborations, as well as the understanding that the children's discriminatory verbalizations are not entirely equivalent to structural discrimination as a political fact. Interwoven with institutional positions towards the students, the discourse against discrimination and for respect to diversity is divorced from the political meaning it adopts for collectives: the more it is processed in regards to local school norms, the greater the distance will be between what it activates in the school and what it mobilizes politically outside it. It will have to do more with the institutional contract guidelines or "political correctness" and less with contesting the actual inequality and the hierarchies embedded in the social structures. Finally, the disciplinary horizon hinders the understanding of the educational and political issue in the communicative interactions among the children: the reproduction of social hierarchical order. Looking through this lens leads to a pedagogical and political question about the force with which power schemata are internalized in childhood. This might explain something more complex about the children's actions, which of course does not take place only within the walls of the school: for instance, the level of identification with power (situational as it may be) required to prevail over a peer by treating him/her as a slave: "you were born to serve me".

Conclusions

We have revealed some aspects of institutional definitions of diversity and discrimination that create specific and problematic resonances in the school environment. We sought to point out that what is being (increasingly) objectivized as discrimination in the educational discourse are the many social conditions involved in the forms of (mis)treatment between peers. This is necessarily divorced from the collective and historical meaning of the principle of respect for diversity and the struggle against discrimination, and it also hinders the complex understanding of one's own actions, distances from and intersections with structural facts. Following this analysis, we suggest that reductionist approaches such as *bullying* promote ahistorical notions of violence and conflicts at school.

We paid special attention to the persistence of hierarchies and their ambivalent interweaving with judgements on forms of treatment and invidualization. In this framework we inquired about the tacit – i.e. not explicit or consciously sought – meanings acquired by the uses of school discourse on discrimination and its paradoxical effects. We raised the question about the distance with which children experience the institutional, adult meanings of difference, given the fact that this discourse is not appropriated in interactions between peers, nor in the interpretations that children construct of instances of discrimination. Rather, what we could reconstruct were bifurcations between the interpretation of what is experienced at school and the understanding of discrimination as inequality, which affects migrants as a collectivity.

While the school communicates – in a relatively systematic way – a clear political message that disapproves of discriminatory verbalizations, it also lets (the children) see the profound ambiguity behind this institutional position, which depends on each teacher's ideological makeup and views. These insights suggest that the visualization of the form of the discriminatory discourse has become widespread, but not the critical awareness of the historical power relationships it embodies. It is worth underscoring that these insights, achieved amidst a transitional political climate of growing hostility towards the migrant population in Argentina, are particularly concerning in an environment in which the material and symbolic legitimacy of rights, as well as the basic principles of equality and non-discrimination, are being undermined by neoliberal governments in Argentina and Latin America.

For these reasons, we have written about these issues also with a deliberate concern about the increase in the language of hate and the pressing need to strengthen the pedagogical and democratic contribution of the discourse against discrimination in the public domain. Having recorded some institutional and juridical biases the increase the paradoxical effects of the school discourse on discrimination, our approach allows us to substantiate the need to redefine theoretically the problem. We suggest inscribing it within a broader and more complex inquiry on the relationship between the identifications and the conceptions of rights in childhood. However, the concrete configurations of the principles of equality and non-discrimination have

become stabilized in a *disciplinary background* that saturates the meaning of what takes place in the schools.

After a comparative review of local studies in recent decades, we have noticed a persistent difficulty over time for the rhetoric of non-discrimination and respect for diversity to be appropriated through the typical operation of knowledge in school, which is de-contextualization; that is, making discriminatory actions explicit, as well as recognizing collective differences in regards to social/ historical/structural processes that concern them, but they are not linked to what happens among peers in the school. In this respect, our discussion of the *disciplinary paradox* deals with pedagogical questions and challenges.

At this point it is important to remember that the structural definition of discrimination belongs to the order of the material historical experience of the groups, which cannot be reduced to representational, cognitive or discursive phenomena. It is the specific character of the interactions between peers and the relationship dynamics in the school that has led us to focus on the level of the verbalizations and the discursive reproduction of social hierarchies.

Through this dimension of analysis we reconstructed multiple clues on the weight of institutional categorizations over the children as students, which intervene in the interpretations of what is experienced in the school environment. The interweaving of disciplinary codes with experiences of discrimination has a deeply political and pedagogic effect: the individualization of what children experience in the school. This *paradox of individualization,* on the other hand, occurs in a space where the institutional rejection of discrimination coexists with the persistence of stigmas and violence against collective belongings. Thus, we understand that verbal interactions in which the hierarchies between "what one is and what one does not want to be" are reproduced acquire their meaning within the processes of cultural production and reproduction taking place in the school.

In this environment, the symbolic and discursive conditions to destabilize historically deployed hierarchies become fragmentary: to question if being white is better than being black, to defend the idea that migrants have the same rights as nationals, or that those who look like indians or are children of Bolivians are as Argentinians as those whose skin is white. The persistence of hierarchies between ethnic, racial, national and/or class identities at school must be thought of in regards to the paradoxes in the concrete and situated configuration of the principle of non-discrimination and the paradigm of diversity in the school.

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