

The teaching of didactics and the teacher trainer's role from the perspective of Visual Arts teaching students

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Abstract

This article derives from a study with 52 students at an undergraduate teacher preparation program in visual arts, with the purpose of analyzing the teacher education constructed in the context of the disciplines of didactics, considering what is taught, how it is taught, and the influence of teacher trainers based on what they do to teach. We decided to investigate this course because its curricular structure, in the specific higher education institution we studied, is still anchored in a technicist-based didactics, thus challenging teacher trainers who approach didactics in a critical perspective. Data collection involved a questionnaire which was administered to students, as well as discussion groups with the participants. Theoretically speaking, the study develops from the assumption that the act of teaching involves the teacher's specialized action to promote students' learning. Because this action is specialized, those who conduct it must mobilize specific which is knowledge academically recognized as a basis of professional teacher knowledge. Our analysis evidences that the object of didactics is central to teaching, but approaching methodologies without sliding towards the technicist perspective is still the teacher trainer's main challenge; internship is recognized as a powerful space-time for education in didactics; and the influence of the teacher trainer on the constitution of teacher professional formation is underscored.

Keywords

Didactics teaching – Teacher trainer – Learning to teach – Teacher education.

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O ensino de didática e a atuação do professor formador na visão de licenciandos de educação artística

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Resumo

Este artigo decorre de um estudo com 52 estudantes de um curso de licenciatura em educação artística, tem como objetivo analisar a aprendizagem da docência construída no contexto das disciplinas de didática, considerando o que se ensina, como se ensina e a influência do professor formador a partir do que ele próprio faz para ensinar. A opção por investigar esse curso se justifica porque a sua estrutura curricular, na instituição de ensino superior (IES) pesquisada, ainda se ancora na didática de cunho tecnicista, desafiando os formadores de professores que trabalham com a formação em didática na perspectiva crítica. Para a obtenção dos dados, foi utilizado um questionário, aplicado aos estudantes, conjugado com a realização de grupo de discussão. Teoricamente, a pesquisa se desenvolveu a partir da compreensão de que o ato de ensinar envolve a ação especializada do professor para promover a aprendizagem de seus alunos. Porque a ação é especializada, aquele que a realiza necessita mobilizar saberes específicos, reconhecidos academicamente como base de conhecimento profissional docente. As análises evidenciam que o objeto da didática é nuclear no ensino, mas a abordagem de metodologias sem resvalar para a perspectiva tecnicista ainda é o principal desafio do formador; o estágio é reconhecido como potente espaço/tempo de formação em didática; e a influência do formador no processo de constituição profissional docente é relevada.

Palavras-chave

Ensino de didática – Professor formador – Aprendizagem da docência – Formação de professores.

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Introduction

This article derives from a research about the teaching of didactics in undergraduate teacher preparation courses, with the purpose of analyzing the knowledge of teaching that is built by future teachers in the context of this discipline, considering what is taught, how it is taught, and the influence of the teacher trainer based on what he does to teach. The study was oriented towards the following goals: a) to analyze what predominates in terms of didactics in teacher education courses, as well as its effects on future teachers' professional formation process; b) to survey the views of students in teacher preparation courses with regard to didactics and its role in teacher education; c) to map the predominant types of didactic mediations that pervade the teaching of didactics in the teacher preparation courses investigated; d) to discuss what the teacher trainer does to teach about teaching from the perspective of his students, i.e., future teachers.

Considering the goals we set, the study was conducted at a public federal university situated in the state of Rio de Janeiro, encompassing fourteen undergraduate teacher preparation courses: biological sciences; social sciences; dance; visual arts; physical education; philosophy; physics, geography; history; letters; mathematics; music; pedagogy; and chemistry.

The participants were students who were attending these courses and had completed around 70% of the disciplines in the curriculum. This percentage was set in order to target students who had attended at least one of the disciplines pertaining to the study of didactics. We collected data by means of an online questionnaire, using the Survey Monkey tool, and we massively administered it to all students who fitted the criteria established for selecting subjects. In addition to the questionnaire, we held four discussion groups, each comprising one to three students at some of the teacher preparation programs investigated.

Still concerning the questionnaire, it is worth noting that it was of a mixed type, combining closed- and open-ended questions in order to obtain specifications for one or more items. The instrument comprised a total of 32 questions, 26 of which were closed-ended, and six open-ended, and they were organized in two parts: 1- *student profile*, with nineteen questions, sixteen of which were mandatory; 2- *teaching and the teacher preparation student* - this part was subdivided in two sections, one which was common to all students regardless of their course and contained five questions, four of which were mandatory, while the other section was dedicated to each course's specific features, and contained eight mandatory questions. It is worth noting that the course-specific section included questions with the same pattern for all respondents, while answer alternatives varied according with the curricular organization of courses. The questionnaire ensured respondents' complete anonymity, only allowing to identify the amount of respondents for each course. Its administration over the second half of 2014 resulted in a set of approximately eight hundred respondents.

With regard to the discussion groups (GD), we chose this methodological strategy in order to favor the collection of data without detaching them from the context of participants, thus causing their views and representations to emerge. GDs, which are a sort of collective interview, helped in problematizing the practices of teacher trainers, a task which was more difficult for a questionnaire.

Theoretically speaking, the study develops from the assumption that the act of teaching involves the teacher's specialized action to promote students' learning. Because this action is specialized, those who conduct it must mobilize specific knowledge which is academically recognized as a basis of professional teacher knowledge (SHULMAN, 2004) or teacher knowledge (*saber docente*)¹ (TARDIF; LESSARD; LAHAYE, 1991). Assuming

1- The author uses here and on various other subsequent passages the Portuguese word *saber*, instead of *conhecimento* (knowledge), intending a

that teaching is not restricted to the deep-rooted notion of transmitting, exposing or presenting certain contents means to recognize that the process that constitutes it can also involve the student's work, rather than only the teacher's, in a perspective of mediation, dialogue, problematization, and investigation.

Thus, discussions about the basis of professional teacher knowledge or teacher know-how have offered a relevant contribution for teachers' formation to outgrow the expectation built about the pedagogical conventional wisdom that, to teach well, one has to master the content. We therefore advocate the specialized action built and underpinned by a solid and relational combination of various types of know-how. If, for Shulman (2004), teaching requires types of know-how concerning the content, didactics, the curriculum, a didactical knowledge of the content, students and their characteristics, educative contexts, and the historical and philosophical foundations of the educative process, to Tardif, Lessard and Lahaye (1991), teacher know-how is plural and mixed, encompassing various types of know-how concerning professional formation, discipline knowledge, curriculum knowledge, and experiential knowledge. We do not wish to make explicit the meanings assigned to each of these sources which feed and constitute the repertoire or reservoir, to use Gauthier's (1998) words, of types of know-how that the teacher mobilizes during the act of teaching. This discussion, a relevant and necessary one, is widely spread in the literature of the area. What we aim in the context of our reasoning is, rather, to stress that in order to teach, it is necessary for the teacher, in his formation, his practice, and over the process of his professional development, to occupy himself with, and be concerned about the foundations of his practice, i.e., about didactics.

Didactics is an important domain of knowledge to teacher formation and practice

distinction for which there is no equivalent in English. In this cases, *know-how* was used as an approximation (translator's note).

concerning the relations established to teach and learn. Didactics knowledge, which is oriented to teaching and, therefore, learning, goes beyond the simplifying comprehension of teaching methods and techniques. As we have advocated, didactics has a knowledge of its own which derives from theorization about what is known and done in relation with the process of teaching and learning. Its knowledge is present in disciplines of teacher preparation courses and in pedagogical practices developed in various spaces of creation and recreation of knowledge, languages, identities, cultures, thus underpinning the relationship between the teacher, the student and school knowledge in a situated context, taking into account students' necessities, potentialities, interests, and difficulties.

In this perspective, the teacher trainer, understood here in the sense of anyone who participates in the process of formation of future teachers, has a crucial role in this movement. A didactics teacher trainer is expected, through his way of mediating teaching, to bring his students – future teachers – to recognize that teaching requires a varied and complex constellation of types of know-how susceptible of theoretical-scientific, scientific-didactic, and pedagogical formalization. Therefore, innumerable factors are implied in teaching, including the way the teacher understands and analyzes his educative practices, how he articulates various types of know-how in his act of teaching, and how this reflects on his actions when faced with the unexpected and the unknown. How is this process perceived and, even more, understood by the students, future teachers? This is the question we try to face in the present study.

This article does not intend to offer a general panorama of the study we conducted, but to strictly focus on one of the fourteen courses investigated, i.e., the teacher preparation course in visual arts, which we chose as the object of analysis of this work because its curricular structure is still anchored in a technician-based didactics, thus challenging teacher trainers who

approach didactics in a critical perspective. To that end, the following sections of this article will focus on the teaching of didactics: between content and form; and the influence of the teacher trainer.

The Teaching of Didactics: between Content and Form

We managed to obtain 52 respondents at the teacher preparation course in visual arts, 36 of whom are female and 16 are male. 88.5% of the students want to be a teacher, and 25% already teach at a public or private school, give private lessons, work for NGOs, etc.

Training in didactics is carried out by means of three disciplines and teaching practice. By this, we mean didactics (the discipline that corresponds to general didactics), primary

teaching methodology, secondary teaching methodology, and teaching practice in visual arts. The course, which was created in the 1970's, went through its last curricular reform in the 1980's. Its official proposition offers a license to teach visual arts and drawing, and its teaching perspective is founded on technicist parameters. The course is offered by the Escola de Belas Artes, and the pedagogical training is provided by the Faculdade de Educação; professors at the latter who teach for the course experience on a regular basis the tension between an official curriculum founded on one perspective and the curricular practice, which counters that perspective, as we found in our previous study, which focused on teacher trainers. With regard to the number of hours and the terms comprised in the course's curriculum, the table below summarizes this information.

Table 1- Terms and number of hours for the disciplines of didactics and teaching practice

Term	Discipline or Curricular Component	Amount of Hours
3 rd	Didactics	45h
4 th	Primary Teaching Methodology	30h
5 th	Secondary Teaching Methodology	30h
5 th	Teaching Practice in Visual Arts	300h

Source: Course Flowchart, available at www.siga.ufrj.br

Of the respondents, 96.4% took didactics, 46.4% attended primary teaching methodology, and 25% attended secondary teaching methodology and teaching practice in visual arts.

Based on the disciplines' official syllabi, we asked participants to indicate the themes covered in the disciplines of didactics and teaching methodology, as well as in teaching practice. Based on their answers, we listed the contents from the highest to the lowest indication rate:

- a) Teaching and Learning (85.71%);
- b) Teacher Specific Field of Work (70.43%);
- c) Creativity in Teaching (67.86%);

d) The Teaching-Learning Process: the Functional position of Assessment and Methodologies (60.71%);

e) Teaching and its Consequences for Didactic Methodology (60.71%);

f) Communication in the Teaching-Learning Process (60.71%);

g) Supervised Observation Internship, Co-Participation in Teaching (53%);

h) New Psychopedagogical Conceptions: the Contributions of Rogers, Piaget and Bruner to Secondary Education (50%);

i) Teaching in a Systemic Approach to Education (46.43%);

j) New Psychopedagogical Conceptions in Primary Education (46.43%);

k) The Use of Teaching Methods Applicable to Secondary Education and the Assessment Process (40%);

l) Adequate Use of Audiovisual Resources (32.14%);

m) Individualized, Socialized, and Social-Individualized Teaching Methods in Primary Education (32.14%).

The themes, which are anchored in a technicist teaching tendency, tend to dialogue with the traditional perspective in connection with educational technology. Finding that respondents, even to a low degree (less than 50% of them), indicated individualized teaching and systemic approach as themes covered means, in our view, a regrettable affirmation of instrumental didactics in a present where society, education, school and teaching call for a fundamental didactics (CANDAUI, 1983; CRUZ, 2014). Even though the approach to contents might rely on critical, multidimensional and multicultural didactics (CANDAUI, 2009), the tension experienced by teachers can compromise the formation process. It is worth stressing that the teaching of didactics cannot exonerate itself from facing the thorny subject of methodologies because the mark of technicism predominates. Participants indicated these themes, but complained about the absence of others, based on the argument of technicism, as will be seen below. Apparently, the technicist tendency manifests in the themes to be covered, teacher trainers challenge this proposal and occupy themselves more with problematizing it than conducting a formative process that favors building the knowledge necessary to teaching, which involves methodologies, but not only them. The students' accounts make this tension visible:

The historical focus, the “mini-revision” made of sociology and psychology of education, took too long. The fear of becoming a technicist discipline prevented from working on more specific tools for

conducting the teaching-learning process. Things stayed too much in the abstract field, I really expected to find at least a few techniques, but it seems this word is forbidden. (Account 14)

Among the contents covered in the teacher preparation course, the pedagogical and scientific types of know-how need to be part of the “solid construction of a scientific-professional know-how which integrates all types of know-how that are mobilized for the practice of the action of teaching” (ROLDÃO, 2007a, p. 37). Considering that the teacher's distinctive feature is the action of teaching, which can be understood as a movement of “causing somebody to learn something” or a movement of transmitting and repeating, we sustain that, in times of widespread access to information, it no longer makes sense to understand teaching as a synonym of transmission, and we thus position ourselves in favor of the former perspective. According with this logic, this dimension of teaching must be clear in the teacher's preparation. The future teacher must have access to the ‘how to cause a given somebody to learn a given curriculum’, considering that this somebody also has a series of specificities.

Therefore, when we criticize technicist didactics and defend critical or fundamental didactics, which relies on the multidimensionality of teaching (CANDAUI, 1983), we do not deny technical training, yet we work to affirm it in the heart of the political, social and human dimension. The pedagogical reason that makes the teacher teach is as important as the way he teaches, and therein resides the difference between critical didactics and technicist didactics.

Back to the subjects in our study, when asked what themes among the ones mentioned earlier they considered indispensable to their teaching practice, three themes stood out: a) supervised observation internship and co-participation in teaching; b) the teaching-

learning process; and – the most cited – c) creativity in teaching.

The fact that many students stressed internship as fundamental is, in our view, very good. Internship has a formative specificity that is still irreplaceable, like didactics. Without the theoretical-practical foundations about teaching, which are built in the context of didactics and methodologies of teaching, how to conduct the internship in the sphere of teaching practice? To one student, internships are indispensable for his teacher practice, articulating him with the “support of methodological practices discussed both in didactics classes and specific teaching methodology classes [as well as the very] discussion about the internship” (Account 5). In this case, the student stresses the role of the disciplines of didactics and specific methodologies as articulators between the knowledge experienced in the internship and the knowledge discussed in those disciplines.

Internships emerge as structural for the course, considering the necessity to perspectivize initial teacher training as an immersion in the work context, a recurrent discussion in studies of teacher education (CANÁRIO, 2001; ROLDÃO, 2007). Roldão emphasizes, moreover, that “initial training will only be effective if it can turn into an *immersion training*, which can also transform work contexts, being conducted with the schools” (2007a, p. 40). To Canário (2001, p. 40, italics by the author), “the professional practice component tends to be seen less and less as a time of application to be considered more and more as the structural element of a professional formative dynamic inspired in a conception of *alternation* [between preparation spaces and professional exercise spaces]”. To him, it is in the work context, i.e., the schools, rather than just in initial preparation courses, that the foundation of professional learning takes place. For this reason, we stress the importance of a dialogue between disciplines of specific didactics and internships, or between university and school. The collaboration between these two education levels, so the

future teacher can be suitably prepared to deal with the school and its problems, making sure he has practical experience and the theoretical foundations built by the disciplines that study education, as Lüdke and Cruz (2005) emphasize, is fundamental for teacher preparation.

In this perspective, didactics classes emerge as more theoretical, presenting a few possibilities of alternatives for pedagogical work, while teaching methodologies, combined with internships, seek to comprise the more practical dimensions. It is worth stressing that the discipline of didactics takes on a comprehensive character regarding themes, particularly those related with the teacher’s specific field of work and discussions about teaching and learning, since it is understood to be the responsibility of specific didactics, in articulation with the internship, to conduct a more practical discussion regarding specific teaching methodologies.

With regard to the teaching strategies used by teachers to promote the appropriation of contents of the discipline, we highlight the following: discussion about the content of the text (82.14%); accounts of teacher’s and students’ experiences related with the theme of the class (71.43%); reading of texts (64.29%); thematic discussions with the text (53.57%); case study (53.57%); explanation by the teacher (50%); explanation by students (46.43%); seminars (46.43%); thematic discussions without the text (39.29%); reviews (39.29%); tests (35.71%); summaries (28.57%); portfolios (10.71%); and examinations (7.14%).

We start from the conception of teaching strategy as the intentional, guiding, and, therefore, planned conception of actions intended to build a certain learning and which, rather than being subordinated to teaching procedures and techniques, involves them in an organic, articulate way, thus representing the very conception and practice of teaching. We rely on Roldão (2009), who argues that the process of curricular development is, in itself, of a strategic nature.

Therefore, the proposition of teaching strategies is closely related with the teacher's conception of teaching. If what prevails is the teaching conception founded on the idea of professing a know-how (ROLDÃO, 2007b), then the know-how to be mobilized by the teacher is that of the discipline, i.e., that which pertains to the content of the subject to be taught, thus requiring teaching strategies that favor the transmission and fixation of that knowledge, and mainly students' understanding of it. The procedures or the techniques and resources used can vary greatly, but they are anchored in the perspective of content appropriation by means of transmission.

In contrast, if the notion of teaching underpinning the teacher's practice corresponds to a process of causing somebody to learn something (ROLDÃO, 2007b), then the types of know-how to be mobilized are plural, involving not only knowledge of the disciplinary content, but also the curriculum, experiential knowledge, and knowledge concerning the foundations of education, including didactics.

The latter conception is no doubt more demanding in terms of the strategies to be adopted, as it carries with it the ideas of differentiation, diversification, problematization, investigation, creation, application, among other actions or sets of actions for teaching and learning.

We will not classify teacher trainers practice in transmissive (i.e., professing a know-how) or mediating (causing somebody to learn something), as the way our data were constructed does not allow to make that judgement, precisely because the study was not geared in that direction. What we can certainly infer is that the teachers aim to teach in a way that the subjects involved in the process work. So, if they present content or recount experiences, so do the students. The form of the class seems characteristic of a class in the context of higher education, with work conducted by students and accompanied by teachers' explanatory syntheses. The question that emerges is: is this the best format for

learning to teach? How do the investigated students evaluate the didactics classes?

With regard to the positive or negative aspects pointed about didactics classes, positive evaluations were recurrent: "in general, didactics classes were good and with a great content" (Account 6). Practices of teaching process organization, the teacher's own didactics, the classroom experience of elaborating a course plan, the horizontal teaching method, the interdisciplinary group work, the broad evaluation, as well as aspects of the trainer's own personality, as being an intelligent, responsible, good-natured teacher, were frequently mentioned. To Lopes and Costa (2009, p. 338), "students tend to more easily find contents interesting when their expectations about the level of demand of the course are confirmed". In this case, it seems our students are generally satisfied with the course. On the other hand, the discipline's heavily theoretical and abstract approach, as well as some isolated complaints about certain teachers who do not teach how to make a class plan, or, still, about a teacher who is not committed, a traditional teaching style, an outdated methodology, and the lack of preparation for supervised internship, appear in the accounts of some students. Few students indicate as weaknesses structural and organizational questions pertaining to the university, such as the lack of resources.

Building on innumerable studies on the effect of the teacher on students' learning, Bressoux (2003) stresses that the effective teacher, i.e., the one who can cause his students to learn, has the following characteristics: he stimulates his students to participate in the class, making a lot of questions; he gives the students time to formulate and reformulate their answers; he passes the contents to students in stages, to avoid overloading them with information; when opening a new discussion, he reviews what has been already learned; he insists on certain points of the subject, even if redundant; he reserves some times for students to handle the new information through exercises or works, which

allows the teacher to see whether students have understood it or not; he supervises students' work during activities, walks around the class to involve it in his conduction. In sum, a good teacher is the one who explains the content well, engages the students in the process, and monitors them during tasks to check whether they have learned a given content or not. According with Bressoux (2003), the teacher should not choose one of these factors in his work, but rather make a combination between them, considering each classroom context.

Although the centrality of classes at the university resides in the reading and discussion of texts, as seen earlier, we can see some of these principles highlighted by Bressoux (2003) in the didactics classes, particularly when the teachers emphasize participation and allow students to work on the content of the course. Even reviewing a few contents apparently unnecessary to some is part of the teaching work.

Many stress the positivity of "working with interdisciplinary groups", "the opportunity for students to explain topics of the class" and "classroom experience in elaborating a course plan". Discussions based on selected texts seem to be organized by the didactics teachers to favor students participation; they also include times for organizing what was learned, whether by having students participate in topics of the class or conducting activities based on what was studied, such as elaborating course and/or class plans. To one respondent, the fact that they study many cases and plan many classes allows them "a vision of what being a teacher is like" (Account 27). In addition, they stress that "in classes, situations and experiences we still haven't experienced are presented" (Account 2), which leads the student to reflect about "what occurs or what can occur [in classroom]" (Account 4). In these latter cases, discussions that allow thinking about the classroom reality are formative, as through them students can prepare for teaching.

With regard to the positive and/or negative aspects about teaching methodology

classes, the following were described as positive: the approaches to visual arts teaching, the historical discussions about arts teaching, the idea that drawing is also a form of educating, the teacher-student interaction, and the specific discussions about the arts area. As for the negative aspects, the following were emphasized: a separation from the reality of arts teaching in public schools; scarce time for internship and even the discipline of practice, where discussions about this internship occur; and lack of support in the specific area, since "of the three visual arts teacher trainers, all three have an arts-based education. Those who come from geometric technical drawing have nobody who can help them in the area" (Account 12). Still concerning specific didactics classes, a few students commented:

I think we should have shared more information about the relationship between the student and the teacher, only, to do that, we should have more classroom time [in the internship], participating as a teacher, rather than just a co-participant. (Account 8)

The methodology disciplines appear as a support for students – future teachers – in their entry in the school reality, by means of internships. To one respondent, the discipline helps thinking about ways of mediating the scientific knowledge and the student's reality. Another one emphasizes the opportunity that internship activities provide for guiding and monitoring the teacher. One student highlights, moreover, a certain alignment between the internship experiences and the discussions in the discipline. However, one respondent feels there should be more information about the relationship between teacher and student, as well as greater participation as a teacher in internships.

As we have noted, this desire of more participatory internships, as shown in one of the accounts, and even the valuing of specific didactics disciplines as a place of dialogue

between the knowledge of the area and more technical knowledge, can mean that these students have passed what Formosinho (2001) considers a first stage in professional formation, which is the learning of teaching at school, by means of their experience as students in primary school for about fifteen years of their lives, having, thus, a consolidated view of what being a student is by observing their teachers. Now, on a second moment, the students are led to confront what they observed as students with the knowledge learned during their course. According with the author, by being within an environment of discussion about his formation, as occurs in teaching practice classes, the intern moves from a traditional student role to the position of a future teacher, a developing professional who begins to reflect about his profession.

The Influence of the Teacher Trainer

About ninety per cent of respondents believe that the way their teachers taught and/or teach helps them think about their future professional practice. The teacher trainer's teaching is constantly evaluated by these students, who mentioned that "the teaching practice is a constant exercise of reflection which takes into account the experiences you go through as a teacher or a student" (Account 1).

The account of the student above stresses the importance of reflection in building the teaching practice, particularly because students now make an evaluation of their formative process based on the discussions and experiences they have in higher education. It is a task of undergraduate teacher preparation courses to help them "analyze these learnings and incorporate them in their formative processes, so as to reconstruct the image that students already have of the teacher's craft" (FORMOSINHO, 2001, p. 50). In this perspective, for students, didactics classes "help them think critically about the journey" ahead of them (Account 11).

Besides the contents pertaining to the discipline, which allow students to get a little closer to the reality they will work with, and which students regard as positive, as seen earlier, we note that the teacher trainer is also evaluated for his attitude and teaching practice in classroom, since, as a student stresses, "the teachers reflect what I want to be like as a teacher, and also what I won't do" (Account 15). In the words of a student:

Many times, I watched and admired the way they [the teachers] conducted the classes; in other [situations], I noticed a certain inconsistency with the discourse presented. So, the strengths, I hope to repeat them, and the inconsistencies, I'll try to mitigate them. (Account 5).

In a study about the relations between ethics and pedagogy in teachers thoughts and practices, Estrela (2010, p.14) evidences that "the teacher's professional ethic and the political project for students' education inevitably cross each other's way. Considering professional ethic as the set of values and principles of a professional group which are discussed and shared with others involved – in our case, the students – the person of the teacher trainer as a professional becomes important in these students' preparation, as he leads them to reflect about their future professional performance. One student calls his teacher trainer's performance an "example", while another student, in Account 5, makes a comparison between trainers, showing admiration for some teachers, although realizing inconsistencies between discourse and practice in others. In this case, he evaluates which practices are positive and should be incorporated in his professional experience, and which he should avoid.

This teacher trainer's recognition "as an example" or "a way to follow" can stem from the fact that, to students, these professionals have "time and experience in the profession, have been through various situations that

happen repeatedly in the school environment” (Account 26). Students find that certain practices which occur in university can also appear in the school context – which includes the very relationship between teacher and student – and are, therefore, part of their professional preparation, as a component of what we might call a hidden curriculum:

Because they are patient in general, and because they remember that, besides students, we are human beings, we have our limitations and other tasks, while also having a strong hand when necessary, it made me gradually see the limits that can occur between teacher and student. (Account 7)

According with Gauthier (1998), one of the essential conditions in every profession is the formalization of the types of know-how necessary for executing the tasks pertaining to the job; however, identifying these know-how types is quite a difficult task. To many students, the teacher has to be intelligent, friendly, and to master the content. Knowledge of the matter is fundamental, but is not, by itself, enough, as the author reminds us. Therefore, we can note that traits of the teacher’s personality or a pleasant relationship with him are considered positive aspects in an evaluation of his teaching. The relationship is of great importance, as Shulman (2004) stresses, as the types of know-how of teachers are activated, related and built in the teaching-learning process through six processes which are common to the act of teaching, one of them being to understand the subjects and their needs, or, as pointed in the account above, “recognizing that we are human beings”.

In discussing the impasses for higher-education pedagogy, Cunha (2010) also stresses that the teacher trainer faces expectations not only about his scientific knowledge, but also his capacity to articulate it with the cognitive and cultural structures of his students. Many “need somebody who understands them, who

notices their codes and possibilities of growth” (CUNHA, 2010, p. 71) or, as one of our students mentions, somebody who recognizes “our limitations”. In this perspective, the relationship between teacher and student emerges as a fundamental one.

Being open for dialogue during classes, evaluating them and, consequently, making decisions about the paths to follow, as well as recognizing the student as a personal and social being, as a human being, is seen as a positive factor for the teaching practice, “because there must be a consciousness [on the part] of the one who is going to teach, to bear in mind that teaching is made of two sides: student and teacher” (Account 10). Lopes and Costa (2009) found that a good relationship between teachers and students in higher education is a significantly positive aspect in the latter’s preparation.

In this respect, Contreras (2002) finds that the teacher’s concern for the well-being of the class is linked to the professional ethic of the former, who needs to establish bonds with students in an affective relationship. This is a moral and not always conscious commitment in the teacher profession. Similarly to Contreras, Esteve (2005, 2006) points that the teacher’s greatest task is to teach his students humanity. In his view, the teacher should help them understand themselves and find the meaning of their lives in the context of the world around them, and thus find their places to participate in society, in our case, their places as future teachers. At each class, in each discipline, the teacher must recover the value of human knowledge. The teacher’s task is “to stir students, to discover the value of what we are going to learn” (ESTEVE, 2005, p. 122). In this last aspect, one student exemplifies that

[...] the way a teacher presents a content may or may not inspire me. As far as I am concerned, when the content is presented along with questions to be thought about, that’s the precise moment it’ll get my attention, because I’ll think about

the theme, I'll research, I'll find [draw] conclusions about it. (Account 24)

To Charlot (2005), the need to build affective relations with students is an anthropological relationship between two generations in which the young expects a word from the adult, as he needs the adult's human experience, and the adult wishes to take care of that new generation, transmitting his heritage to it. This does not mean, as seen in Account 7 above, that the teacher loses the conduction of the pedagogical process, making the course organization overly flexible; rather, it means that the teacher seeks, according with Cunha (2010), a balance between his experience and the student's autonomy in the latter's learning process.

The students also highlight aspects related with the organization of the teaching process by the teacher as a formative element of their future practice. To them, the teacher's way of working "makes me think about what works or not. What I tend to automatically repeat and what I should repeat. It makes me aware. In addition to providing me with tools to be used in the future" (Account 14).

These future teachers evaluate what works in a classroom based on their own experience as apprentices of that content. They analyze the methodology used by the teacher to approach certain contents, the strategies and resources mobilized for each class, they reflect about what works or not, understanding that each situation, content or group will require a differentiated approach.

One last aspect to be raised is the teacher's involvement with what he does, i.e., to teach. In studies about internship, Rodrigues (2009) found that the way teachers refer to the profession can affect the future teacher's view about teaching and choosing this craft. There are reports of students mentioning that many teachers at primary schools and teacher preparation courses have questioned: "a bright student like you wants to be a teacher?". That demotivates these students about their decision

to teach for a career. One of our respondents goes into that topic. To him, in didactics classes:

[...] there's too much theory, too much history, too many discussions about the social aspects surrounding teaching. I know these are very important contents, but I also believe that teaching is a passion, a love that I see in other teachers. This emotional aspect, the way I see it, is what separates a teacher who's passionate about what he does from one who does it just for the sake of it. I realize that most teachers in the teaching area don't rouse that love in classes. (Account 17)

It is common for college students to discuss about teachers who show they do not like to/cannot teach. They master the content and are recognized in their expertise areas; however, they may be teaching because their university job requires them to. We attribute this question to the traditional dissociation between teaching, research and extension, with research being the only one that normally brings value and recognition to higher education teachers, particularly on the part of funding agencies.

In the account above, our respondent stresses the emotional aspect of the teaching process, which he considers a passion. In treating the teacher's moral commitment as a dimension of the teacher profession, Contreras (2002, p. 77) highlights that "this moral aspect of teaching is strongly linked to an emotional dimension present in every educative relationship". According with the author,

[...] the desire to provide good teaching, or to feel committed to certain educative values and aspirations, such as an indignation at, and a repulse of reproachable teaching situations, is the demonstration that the moral commitment is also an emotive impulse, a feeling, and even a passion. In fact, feeling

committed or morally “obliged” reflects this emotional aspect of experiencing the bonds with what one considers valuable. (CONTRERAS, 2002, p. 77)

In this perspective, the ways of conducting classes that earn students’ admiration or, in the other extreme, doing it just for the sake of it, the inconsistencies between discourse and practice during classes, are expressions – usually unconscious on the part of teachers – which denote the value each teacher assigns to teaching. Contreras (2002) also mentions that, at some point, each teacher must come face to face with the practice he conducts (and believes to be the best for the educative process) and with his level of commitment to the profession and students, thus assuming his position of influence, since, as we have seen, this is also a formative aspect.

The concept of the teacher as an exemplary intellectual, which Fichtner (2013) uses as an analytical category to think about the teacher’s relationship with scientific knowledge, the school, and society, underscores the personal dimension of the teacher profession and it can be explanatory to our student’s uneasiness when he tries to distinguish “the teacher who’s passionate about what he does and a teacher who does it just for the sake of it”. To the author,

[...] the teacher’s work, in its essence, does not properly exist in what he does, but rather in what he personally is. It is not a teacher’s methods, techniques, actions and words which are decisive, but his spirit, his authenticity, his credibility. Students will be motivated and intensely guided by him when whatever he teaches represents a personal concern of his, i.e., when he is simply authentic in his practice. The teacher represents a living model of the union of knowledge and personal attitude towards knowledge. (FICHTNER, 2013, p. 223, italics by the author)

Thus, being evaluated by his involvement with the profession, the course and students, as well as his consistency regarding discourse and practice, is an element that gives the teacher trainer credibility in the formative sense. He actually becomes an example or a model, particularly when it comes to teacher preparation, where one cannot dichotomize the scientific and technical knowledge from the teacher’s person.

As we have seen, the disciplines of didactics have an important place in teacher training, not only because they provide tools that allow the student to think about his classroom practice, but also because of the very question of the teacher trainer being seen, at times, as a reference or an archetype in the future teacher’s identity construction (MARCEL; CRUZ, 2014). We find that surveying higher education teaching practices can also contribute for the effort to review teacher preparation, since “coming closer to [...] this knowledge, explicating it, understanding it, and analyzing it in depth can reveal leads about how to prepare teachers or how to propose alternative practices which are working in the difficult situation of Brazilian teaching today” (ANDRÉ, 1992, p. 36).

Conclusion

Our interest in analyzing what predominates in terms of didactics in teacher preparation courses, as well as its effects on future teachers’ professional constitution process, motivated the study presented here, with an emphasis on how a group of 52 undergraduate students in a teacher preparation course in visual arts viewed didactics and its role in teacher formation. To that end we approached the predominant types of didactic mediation in the context of the disciplines of didactics, teaching methodology and teaching practice, as well as what the teacher trainer does to teach about teaching.

The results allow us to compose a relatively representative picture of the role of

didactics in teacher preparation, bringing us to the four conclusions bellow.

The first is that the technicist emphasis, characteristic of the instrumental didactics officially predominant in curriculums until the mid-1980's, and which underpins the proposal of the course we investigated, challenges teacher trainers in the exercise of their teaching, since it increases the culturally existing difference between the prescribed curriculum and the practiced curriculum. The need to contest the themes comprising the disciplines' syllabi creates a relationship with the discipline that seems to weaken the approach to contents that actually pertain to didactics, at the risk of reinforcing the idea of an instrumental didactics. How to teach teaching methodologies without sliding into the technicist perspective is teacher trainer's main challenge, and it is not always conquered.

The second conclusion is that the object of didactics – i.e., the teaching-learning process – occupies a core position in the teaching of didactics, due more to the themes approached than to the trainer's didactic mediation. Although the teaching strategies varied, students reported they did not perceive trainers' choices as serving a specific pedagogical reason in treating a given subject. The didactics classes are common, with no difference from those of other disciplines in the teacher preparation course. We advocate that didactics classes should differ from others, not because they resort to diverse, dynamic, ludic, relational, integrated, interdisciplinary, intercultural activities, but because they problematize form. With didactics being the field of knowledge that studies teaching concepts and practices to promote students' learning, what is taught,

justified by the reason why it is taught, cannot disregard the way it is taught. The form-content relationship needs to be taken into more consideration as a formative condition of the future teacher.

We concluded, moreover, that the supervised internship combined with the discipline of teaching practices is considered by the students a singular space/time of formation through which they can approach teaching possibilities in their area. In this perspective, the fact that the teacher in charge of supervising the internship is the same one who teaches specific didactics in the disciplines of primary teaching methodology and secondary teaching methodology (terms still used by the course investigated²) is positive as it ensures the necessary connection between the contents studied about teaching and their development in the context of a primary education classroom.

The fourth conclusion is that the teacher trainer's influence on the identity constitution process of future teachers is not contested by students. On the contrary, even though they question certain attitudes or silences with regard to certain themes, the teacher's role is recognized, and his practice observed as a parameter for students' own practice.

We close by stressing the necessity for the teaching of didactics to experience a process of revision in order to assume the learning of teaching as its focus, understanding learning as its specificity, and considering that learning involves a specialized action constructed and underpinned by a solid and relational contribution of different types of know-how.

2- The author refers to the terms *1º Grau* and *2º Grau* which were officially replaced in the 1996 *National Education Guidelines and Framework Law*, by *Ensino Fundamental* and *Ensino Médio*, respectively (translator's note).

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