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LIVING AND FEELING O'PELOURO: TEACHERS EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN A SPANISH "REAL" INCLUSIVE SCHOOL

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Background

O Pelouro is a Spanish state-subsidised educative centre that welcomes all kind of students, integrating them in to an educational approach known as "Interactive Intersective pedagogy". As a school considered as a centre of 'Psychopedagogy innovation and integration', it enjoys particular privileges such as being able to act differently to other schools in Spain. However, the law only grants some freedom to the school and does not exempt it from exposure to assessments of, and achievement measured against national standards by their students. The most distinguishing feature of this educational initiative is its inclusion of ALL students through the creation of a community, which nurtures a "healthier self construction" as a core for child development (Rodriguez de Llauder & Ubeira, 1997).

The students are the cornerstone of this project; therefore every activity is focused on their development. On the other hand, the teacher is seen as a mediator in the "interactive triangle" which is also formed by student and object. It explains relations beyond the agents involved in the educative process. This idea of interaction is inspired by Vygotsky's "Cultural-Historical Activity Theory" (Daniels, 2001) Within this approach, the teachers' role entails a redefinition of his/her identity and dedication, as well as challenging their ideas about education and society.

The kind of involvement, which O Pelouro demands of its teachers, requires an exposition and management of their feelings on their everyday interactions. With regard to this, Hochschild (2002) discusses how some emotional involvements can impact in different ways, referring to this process as "emotional labor".

Research Questions

The focus of this research is the emotional involvement of education professionals working in an inclusive school, which is characterized by its unusual educational framework. This paper is concerned with two issues. The first concern is about getting more familiar with the characteristics of this "peculiar" school, posing questions such as what is O Pelouro? What is its philosophy? How is life inside O Pelouro? What makes O Pelouro different to other inclusive schools? The second concern focuses on analyzing Moments where emotional discourses that involve the teachers seem to become visible and how these moments seem to shape the teachers as emotional subjects

Methods

The study is a qualitative research using an ethnographic approach. During two months the researcher threw himself into the life of the school, living the experience as a participating observer. Through the analysis of the field notes collected during the field work, in addition to compiled literature about O Pelouro, the researcher produces (and negotiates) a "fictitious narrative" that presents the information as a story. This construction is based on the data collected, in order to engage the reader in the ethnographic experience. Bringing into play this form of text, the researcher is taking a narrative approach that wrestles with the ongoing tensions that circulate between ethnographic writing and reporting on a more scientific account. The narrative produced is analyzed through discourse analysis.

Frame

Emotions are seen as discursive practices (Strongman, 2003 and Zembylas, 2006: 264) located in particular spaces and amongst procedures that reinscribe particular power relations, creating new forms of subjectivity and regulating professional practices such as in the case of teaching (reference needed here). Emotions are understood as being situated in the discourse rather than in an internal mechanism as is defended by modern discourse (Strongman, 2003) This would suggest that emotional relationships might be able to be tentatively analyzed through discursive productions. This specific form of discourse is known as "emotional discourse" (Zembylas, 2006). Such aversion of emotions as an external feature is also supported by a social constructivist approach. (Harre, 1986)

Research findings

With regards to the first research question, O Pelouro is presented as a different approach to education that brings into practice a different paradigm: the "Interactive Intersective Pedagogy" (Molina, 1997) It can be seen as part of a discourse of change that disturbs the tranquillity of the current pedagogy in Spanish schools. Contemporary education in Spain is particularly tied into a modern society in which institutions and practices seem to be in contradiction with a postmodern society (Hargreaves, 1998). This study produces a picture of the school; showing how its characteristics differ from mainstream schooling in Spain, and challenging ways in which the emotionality of the teachers can be understood to be played out in such a different educational context contributing to the understanding of teachers' emotional labour and their subject construction.

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