

Senses that first-year students build around the university and university knowledge.

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First, I want to thank Prof. Valerie Melin for her invitation to this event. For some years we have been developing cooperation activities with her and with Prof. Rosemeire Reis from the Federal University of Alagoas. These activities have allowed us to enrich ourselves by finding common findings and particularities about the experience of students at the beginning of university studies in Argentina, Brazil, and France.

In Argentina, the enrollment of higher education has expanded at a high rate throughout the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. This has resulted in one of the higher gross university education rates in Latin America corresponding to 40,03% of young people between 18 and 24 years of age in 2019 (Vercellin, Gibelli y Chironi, 2022)

This trend implies the transit of an elite university to a model of mass access, a transit that on the other hand has promoted the democratization of the university, since it facilitated the incorporation of traditionally excluded sectors. But at the same time, this growth in access to higher education does not necessarily result in inclusion, the income and exit indicators demonstrate this. And the high desertion in the first year of university careers denounce that unrestricted access-characteristic access hallmark of the Argentine university - by itself, it is not enough.

Abundant literature refers to failure in university studies. Although the analysis perspectives are varied and account for the diversity of factors (epochal, social, political-institutional, didactic and subjective) that converge in the success or failure in the first year of university studies, an argument that stands out, emphasize in the student's deficits. Our analysis seeks to understand how the new student situation is constructed, and not "what is missing" to be a successful student in this initial period. To this end, starting from a theoretical option that recovers the contributions of studies on the relationship with knowledge and the interpretive hermeneutic methodological tradition and narrative research, we propose to analyze the set of meanings that the new student builds around the university and university knowledge.

The communication is organized in four sections. First, I will briefly describe the Argentine university system. Then I will present our way of approaching the problem of university entrance and, finally, I will share the set of meanings that the new student builds around the university and

university knowledge. I will conclude by indicating that these nuclei of meanings question the grammar of the university and that, therefore, we must listen to them.

The Argentine university system

The Argentine university education system has antecedents prior to the constitution of the national state (1853): the National University of Córdoba was created in 1612 by the Kingdom of Spain and the University of Buenos Aires in 1821 by the government of the province of the same name.

By 2017, the last year with official university statistics from the Ministry of Education of the Nation (2020), the student enrollment distributed according to Table 1, just over 1,900,000 registered.

Table1. Argentine University Registration (2021)

Undergraduate / Grade Students	Students	% by type
States Universities	1.872.591	80,77%
Privates Universities	445.664	19.23%
TOTAL	2.318.255	100%

Source: Own elaboration based on statistics from the Ministry of Education (2021)

Even though the proportion of the population between 25 and 65 years of age with an university degree is low, since it reaches 10% of the total of that age group (National Institute of Statistics and Censuses, 2010). The coverage of higher education is one of the highest in Latin America then, while for the subcontinent it is around 44%, in Argentina it reaches 57.8% (Chiroleu, 2018).

Although the university system is composed of a similar number of state and private institutions, the state sector concentrates 78.36% of the student enrollment. Likewise, national universities are distributed throughout the Argentine territory (2,800,000,000 continental square kilometers), so that at least one national university is in each province. In the case of the province of Córdoba there are three of them and about 20 in the province of Buenos Aires. Private universities and institutes, on the other hand, concentrate their offer in big cities: Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Rosario and Mendoza.

Grade and undergraduate student enrollment are also concentrated in only six national universities (Buenos Aires, Córdoba, La Plata, Rosario, Tecnológica Nacional and Tucumán) where, in 2015 had studied 49% of them (García de Fanelli, 2018). This is even though since the 60s the different governments have developed policies of decentralization of the system with the creation of new universities. Thus, from 1990s until 2015, the number grew up from about 80 to 125 institutions

of higher education. The new universities have been created in the provinces and in the Buenos Aires suburbs (geographical areas adjacent to the city of Buenos Aires, with a high population concentration).

Law No. 27,204 states that "all persons who have completed Secondary Education may enter the Higher Education Level freely and unrestrictedly". By law there should be no selection mechanisms. In general, a number of applicants to enter through the establishment of vacancies or maximum quotas per career are not usually established. There aren't aptitude or knowledge tests implemented at the end of high school for university access. In a few careers, there are selective exams, with quotas. These are the careers corresponding to professions regulated by the State because their practice compromises the public interest, putting at risk the health, safety, rights, assets or training of the inhabitants, such is the case of medical careers, architecture and engineering, among others. Notwithstanding this, a large number of universities implement a series of teaching-learning activities upon admission, which are transformed into university admission systems. We will get back to this point later.

State university institutions do not charge fees for grade careers. The National State finances universities assigned an annual global budget to each one. In 2018, the investment made by the National State in the UUNN was 0.76% of GDP (IEC CONADU, 2018). As García de Fanelli and Adrogué (2019) point out, "gratuity, and the assumption of institutional homogeneity that reigns among Argentine state universities, thus contribute to the social perception of equal opportunities" (p.22).

Nevertheless, academic sectors and international organizations warn that access, by itself, is not enough. "Higher education must try to simultaneously achieve the objectives of equity, relevance and quality. Equity is not just a matter of access - the objective must be the participation and successful conclusion of the studies, while ensuring the welfare of the student" (UNESCO, 2009, p. 03). And the retention indicators in the first year of university careers show this: only 30% of new registrants maintain the regularity after the first year (UNRN, 2018).

These indicators have installed Argentine college admission in the political and academic agenda in the last decade.

The first-year problem

Abundant literature refers to failure in university studies. Although the analysis perspectives are varied and account for the diversity of factors (epochal, social, political-institutional, didactic, and subjective) that converge in the success or failure in the first year of university studies, an argument

that stands out, emphasize in the student's deficits, lack of: previous knowledge, of certain necessary cultural capital, of family references, in the appropriation of higher education codes (linguistic, institutional), of study habits, etc. Our analysis seeks to understand how the new student situation is constructed, and not "what is missing" to be a successful student in this initial period (Charlot, 2006). To this end, starting from a theoretical option that recovers the contributions of studies on the relationship with knowledge (Charlot, 2008; Beillerot, Blanchard Laville y Mosconi, 1998 y Chevallard, 1991) and the interpretive hermeneutic methodological tradition and narrative research, we propose to analyze the set of meanings that the new student builds around the university and university knowledge

We support the conjecture that "a knowledge has no meaning and value other than in reference to the relationships it supposes and produces with the world, with oneself, with others" (Charlot, 2008, p.105). And that this sense comes from the articulation that the subject generates between this knowledge with which he has learned throughout his previous schooling and in daily life, with the relationships maintained with others in the learning situation and with the ways in which that the self-image (identity dimension) is modified, as a learner (Vercellino, 2020).

The relationship with knowledge is defined as the organized set, inseparably social and singular, of relationships that a human subject maintains with everything that depends on learning and knowledge (Charlot, 1997). It is "the relationship of a subject with the world, with himself and with others. (Charlott, 2008a, p.126). Knowing is a way of meaning and acting on the world, "there is only knowledge within a certain relationship with the world - which turns out to be, at the same time and for the same reason, a relationship with knowledge" (Charlot, 2008a, p.103). These relationships are conceptualized by Chevallard (2003) as the system of all the interactions that an individual can have with an object. It gathers what the subject 'knows' (or thinks he knows) about the object, what he can say about it, the use or misuse he makes of it, his feelings and emotions towards the object, the content of dreams where the object appears (Chevallard, 2003; 2015).

Beillerot (1996), for his part, states that the relationship with knowledge implies a process through which a subject "from the knowledge acquired, produces new unique knowledge that allows him to think, transform and feel the natural and social world" (Beillerot, 1996, p.112). This process is understood as a knowledge-creating process, to produce reconstructed meanings from the available meanings, a process that allows it to be linked with the world.

This communication present nucleus of meaning around admission in which students agree and we identified from 11 conversational interviews carried out within the framework of a research project in the Río Negro University.

In the interviews, what becomes relevant for the student is recovered, the value of what is evoked, in the search for meaning and the pedagogical importance of educational situations lived in daily life. Thus, the story of the experience is a "vehicle for meaning, a text in which experience and knowledge are part of an indivisible whole, where orality, corporality and affections are tied" (Misichia, 2018, p. 165).

The interview focuses on the recollection of a significant experience when entering the University and is structured in three parts: the first presentation of both the researcher and the student, the second referring to the situation of the student in relation to the experiences in the context of remote education imposed by the pandemic and the third and central one for the contributions of the research, focused on the remembrance of a significant situation in the entrance to the University. From this request, a conversation was generated in which the story was given priority, to which the student decided to comment and from there -when the story was exhausted-, questions were incorporated that allowed delving into the meanings that They were emerging from the words.

Some proposals of the phenomenological-hermeneutic methodology of M. Van Manen (2003) are taken up again, structuring the analysis as the process of recovery of the themes that are identified in the expressions of the experiences lived as essential, which through the reduction allow account for nuclei of meaning. Thus, thematization is not a categorization, but a tool to reach the meaning of the experience through the senses that its protagonists give it.

The stories did not contain data but senses, which constituted meanings as social constructions that integrated experiences, values, and representations; where became relevant on this occasion regarding the experiences as incoming students (Vercellino, Misichia, 2021).

We start from the hypothesis that the time of entry, the encounter with the new institution, supposes such a radical modification in structuring aspects of the teaching-learning experience that, as a crisis and limit situation, it can configure the opportunity for a certain egological decentering and for reflection, not only on the teaching-learning situation, but also on the relationship with knowledge, others, the institution, and oneself in that situation. Thus, the experience of the interview itself becomes a propitious opportunity for the incoming student's relationship with knowledge to be analyzed and questioned by the students themselves. (Vercellino, Misichia, 2021)

Emerging sense nuclei

I will share with you four knots of meanings that appear referred to the time of entry, as fundamental experiences of that time. Next, each one is described and they provide clippings of stories referring to them.

New institutional relationship with knowledge

The University sustains and proposes an "institutional relationship with knowledge" (Chevallard, 2015) that is new for freshman students, different from the relationships with knowledge of the institutions in which they have previously passed. And, in addition to its novelty, this institutional relationship with knowledge puts the forms that have been built up to that moment in tension.

The new institutional relationship with knowledge that students identify implies: a) a new temporality: the organization, intensity, temporal cadences, are different from those learned in previous schooling. b) new ways of approaching knowledge, in the sense of a new commitment to the work of studying (sit down, work hard, put in hours, study well, make it cool), as well as new ways of carrying out this work (summarizing, preparing oral, read).

Likewise, they discover that knowledge has a different configuration: deeper, the same in other contexts, more topics in less time, etc. This is how the students expressed it:

"(...) the leap from high school to college is very big and not only for knowledge, but for study methodology, for basically sitting down to study, something that I did not do many times in high school because just listening to what was said in class and taking notes I could already pay. So, college was a very big leap, in that regard it was quite impressive for me and for a few classmates, I would say for the majority" (EJ39, Telecommunications Engineering student, Bariloche, Andean Campus, 21 years old)

Novelty is meant as "leap", "step". The entrants focus on the confusion that this meeting generates for them and highlight that having or not a family with university experience or having gone through experiences (still unsuccessful) in other universities are conditioning factors are achieved, in ignorance of that

Cope with failure

An explanatory key that insists in relation to the continuity of studies is learning to "cope with failure", closely linked to the forms of evaluation and accreditation of the university ("fail courses", "lose subjects").

Several of the interviewees emphasize experiences of disappointment, fundamentally linked to the novelty of 'losing courses', disapproving finals, appealing subjects. The 'exam' device, getting around it, overcoming it, avoiding it (through promotion, for example), appears as one of the critical events of the first year.

“Also break a little the pride that one has. For me this means a lot, it involves a lot of effort. (...) failed exams. Any failed exam is a bit shocking when you think you can never fail”. (EJ 14, student of the Technician in Organic Plant Production, El Bolsón, 36 years old)

"The first year I couldn't pass some subjects, I was kind of sad about it, but then I kept getting involved and now I'm in the second year, I have passed seven or eight subjects." (MG02, Electronic Engineering student, Bariloche, 23 years old)

“Of my classmates that I entered the university there are three people left, four. The majority dropped out entirely, they began to fail, they couldn't cope with failure because coping with failure is an important mental task, failing and continuing and wanting to continue and wanting to pass two, three times. I am an expert in failing courses and I continue studying, because of the previous degree I tell you, because here I come quite well”. (SV11, Environmental Sciences student, Viedma, 27 years old)

Support nets

The formation of relationship networks is indicated as a resource that favors the continuity of studies. To a lesser extent, certain professorial figures appear as significant.

The peer group appears to play a fundamental role, in differential aspects: as emotional support (they need to become attached, become friends), as collaborators in the task of studying, as others to emulate or who provide models of how to study, how to organize themselves as holders of knowledge to transmit.

The professorial figures are highlighted by two interviewees. Support, encourage, cool, be patient, are traits of the outstanding teachers.

Demands towards the institution

Another knot of meanings appears linked to demands or requirements of the students towards the institution for the times of admission. They demand to create conditions to “enter in the university situation”. These conditions appear articulated to allow time to learn about the new forms of study and to achieve the learning that is demanded.

The institutional admission devices that the university has designed (compulsory subjects for admission), the introductory subjects to the careers, are meant as curricular spaces that contribute to that immersion in the university. Also, the rather recreational activities of the first weeks.

Some interviewees highlight the advice that relatives with university experience and teachers have given them in relation to how to face the demands of the university: keep up to date, read beforehand.

Other structural conditions to which they refer are those linked to the number of students per teacher, the evaluation processes in the first year and participation in other academic instances, in addition to classes: conferences, research projects, etc.

Regarding the evaluation, the problematization carried out is extremely interesting and raises the need to think about specific evaluation guidelines for the first year: In his words:

“You can't ask an incoming student to handle himself at the entrance university as you pretend that everything has to be handled, so what does P. (some professor) do? she takes seven recoveries from you if you need to approve, because she doesn't discourage you, she allows you to continue, if you don't go, she looks for you, she looks for the return. (...) But if it has to be highlighted, I would highlight that (...) try to give them the subjects, even with a low grade, but encourage them to continue, because the first year is a leveling year and many subjects are shared in the first year and the specific ones They start later and you cannot start with the specific one, (...), you cannot know the degree you are doing without passing the first year, which is leveling. So you can't know if you're good at something if you didn't even get there, because of these obstacles that I tell you out there that are the egos of the teachers, that I have to give my class like this. (SV11, Environmental Sciences student, Viedma, 27 years old)

Surely it makes us uncomfortable to hear the idea of "giving a note"... that phrase gives us chills. Anthropology has studied early on that very human act like giving something to another person. Mauss's essay on the Theory of Gifts deals with the way in which the exchange of objects between groups articulates and builds the relationships between them. He held that donating or giving an object (gift) makes the giver great and creates an inherent obligation in the recipient that he must return the gift. The resulting series of exchanges that occur between individuals in a group establishes one of the first forms of social solidarity used by human beings. The gift establishes strong relationships of correspondence, hospitality, mutual protection, and assistance...

The university and educational institutions in general have managed to turn one of the most dignifying acts of our culture into a rejectable action, when it comes to donating assessment scores, which is nothing more than giving another opportunity.

It is that advancing in these types of strategies implies going and disputing a hard core of the academy and of teaching power, such as evaluation and accreditation. Will we be able to contextualize the evaluation processes and criteria to the admission situation, considering the first year as the

introductory year? Will we be capable of designing evaluation devices that do not constitute obstacles, but instances for reviewing the teaching process and the university admission process itself?

Conclusion

These stories return critical knots that invite the review of institutional and teaching strategies that contemplate the complexity of the initial time.

These nuclei of meanings arising from the recognition of the knowledge experience that the first-year students have generated from their initial experience in university studies, will focus on fundamental aspects of university grammar that would be critical.

In the first place, didactic knowledge must recognize the specificity of the learning processes that occur in the first year and that do not result in a continuity of the modalities of previous schooling, since it is not only about new knowledge but about a new institutional relationship with the knowing

Secondly, the academic regime, specifically, the regulations and practices of evaluation, accreditation and certification of knowledge needs to be reviewed, fundamentally in its articulation with the university timetable that establishes, based on the organization in four-month and annual courses, exam shifts, correlative systems and approval criteria, reference guidelines on the necessary and sufficient time for certain learning and the facilitation or hindrance of the path that each student can follow.

Thirdly, and associated with the above, the way to organize people, the types of groupings that are promoted (large groups, smaller groups), the criteria for accessing the different groups of students (academic progress, etc.) appear as a critical institutional condition, cohort in which he enrolled, associated with the correlative regime), the ad hoc devices generated by the institutions, etc. That the system of institutional practices of the university provides for the formation of groups or, on the contrary, disintegrates those initial ties, appears as a relevant element for the students interviewed.

In summary: didactic knowledge, practices, and regulations for the evaluation of learning and ways of organizing people, constitute structural elements of the university device, which, articulated to the spatio-temporal organization, are highlighted by the students.

The epistemic and methodological strategy of giving students a voice, of approaching university admission from their perspective, thus proves to be fruitful, powerful, in its contributions to understanding the problem.

It remains to listen even more to those who have abandoned the University, to understand the situation of abandonment and review the institutional strategies to continue building paths that

support the right to university education, not only from the singular, but as a collective right that contributes to a democratic community.

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