

# Shared meanings of the school culture's symbolic universe in the merging of preschool, elementary, and middle school scenarios

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Florentino Silva Becerra  
cienaga16m@hotmail.com

José Antonio Ramírez Díaz  
sigeanton@hotmail.com

UNIVERSIDAD DE GUADALAJARA, JALISCO, MÉXICO



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— Abstract —

The present work addresses, which consequently has generated the pronouncement of the aims of education in the 21st century; challenges to the teaching and learning transformation process, its task is to provide learning so that it becomes meaningful, relevant, and useful knowledge for life. Each school is involved in the context that gives it its own culture; the content by the attitudes, values, beliefs, and habits and the form of the representations of association, characteristics of the school groups, and space of construction of their identity. These relationship spaces where the elements that structure a code of its own are established, giving rise to the legitimation of school culture, allow explaining the reproduction of teaching and learning in schools from their habitus that derives in a cultural baggage built. The objective is to analyze the observations at different times to obtain from the practices of preschool, elementary, and middle school teachers the social reality that builds the meanings that make up the school culture in the spaces shared between these scenarios. The selection of three basic education schools; one of preschool, one elementary, and one middle school contained the focus on three subjects: Mathematics, Geography, and Science II, all these of urban development, to investigate how the meanings that make up the school culture are constructed, the observations integrate the first data collection and analysis phase, the cases are selected for their similarities, then they are chosen for their differences. The social relations to understand this reality from ethnography are explained in this work, where the school culture sets its own goals under the position of the scope of its autonomy that it has configured, a consolidated space where the functioning of symbolic capital allows certain functions.

**Keywords:**

*Elements of culture; symbolic capital; situated practice; social group; identity; changing environments.*

Each school is immersed in its cultural space comprised of attitudes, values, beliefs, habits, and the exposed way in the representations of association, characteristic of the school groups where its identity is built, that is structured in its own symbolic capital.

These spaces of relationship, where the elements that structure a code that integrates its symbolic capital are established, integrated by the interactions that legitimize the teacher's practice in the classroom for the internalization of school culture, allow to explain the reproduction of teaching and learning in schools from their *habitus* that derives from a built cultural baggage, that is, their internalized dispositions of the perceptions and feelings of teachers that are built from the interaction in community.

The aims of 21st-century education allow the emergence of a paradigm where complexity, as a synonym of the challenge to the teaching and learning process transformation, establishes processes where students have the task of achieving learning for it to become significant, relevant, and useful knowledge for life, responding to a way of living, producing, consuming and relating to finding the definition of socialization; teaching and learning challenges, which allow them to face the situations that arise in life. In this unstable environment that determines the new trends in education, teaching practice is addressed in changing and diverse environments, where today, a variety of sources are proposed that must be selected from the students' needs for the information management, thus attracting creativity, pondering, the generation of flexible thinking, problem-solving, collaboration with others and the formation of personal goals and the design of strategies to achieve them, scenarios that have changed as a result of technological progress that changes the ways of thinking, feeling and relating.

Teaching practices based on their habits explain the reproduction of teaching in schools, where in this context, teaching practice requires transforming itself along with these new requirements necessary for the formation of citizens, schools show their resistance as an immediate response to uncertainty; objections derived from a built cultural baggage, *establishing their own goals* under the position of the scope of their autonomy that has been configured and that is manifested in its effects.

In this cultural context, the perception, evaluation, and performance of its participants give life to their social trajectory, actors who, with their thinking, inhabit them and keep them active, alive, and in force, associating their socially defined position as a school collective.

So, we should ask what are the elements that teaching practice has assimilated from the in situ school culture? How are the constituent elements of on-site school culture related in teaching practice at preschool, elementary, and middle school levels?

Aiming at the analysis of the observed preschool, elementary, and middle school teacher practices, highlighting the social reality where the meanings that make up the school culture are built and shared between both educational levels.

The issue of obtaining information through participant observation is selective, that is, social categories emerge from inductive processing, from the micro-ethnography that is carried out in the process of this work, and the interactive aspects are interpreted parallel to the construction of categories, allowing to classify the data collected according to units of content giving rise to a process of management and organization to connect the results obtained to a more extensive body of knowledge, interpret them and give them meaning.

The theoretical field has the purpose of focusing on the interactions where the elements of culture are manifested, forming a corpus for the understanding of socially constituted and shared by teachers as a social group.

## METHODOLOGY

Three basic education schools were selected: one preschool, one elementary, and one middle school with three subjects: Mathematics, Geography, and Science II selectively where social categories emerge from inductive processing, the data collected allows to generate the connection between categories, focusing on the interactions where the elements of culture are manifested, forming a corpus for socially constituted and shared understanding, to investigate how the meanings that make up school culture is constructed; the observations integrate the first phase of data collection and analysis, the cases are distinguished by their similarities, subsequently they are chosen for their differences, the similarities allow the creation of categories, the differences make it possible to find particularities.

The ethnographic approach explains these social relationships to understand reality from the moment the data emerge (Glasser & Strauss, 1967).

The theoretical field that focuses on the elements of culture interaction forming in the *habitus*, finds its purpose in the understanding of socially constituted and shared with the group of teachers, where the identification, communication, and interaction of categories becomes possible (Glasser, 1992).

It is a micro-ethnographic work that takes three schools as a selective sample that collects the data of the empirical study, carried out from the interactions of the actors, starts from the idea of the basic elements of the school culture that constitute the relationships between the actors: the procedures, rituals, values, and norms considered as a part of the school culture because this is a condition that very powerfully influences the possibilities of changes in educational institutions and their orientation (Owens, 2001).

In this regard, Criado (2004: 82) expresses that the culture of schools is a thought that emerges from generating reproduction, "prefiguring concepts generated by actors, a process that explains the production of reproduction."

#### GUIDELINES CONSTITUTING THE SCHOOL ORDER

Below are descriptive cuts of the teaching practice generated by the teachers observed in various didactic ways that make up the symbolic structure manifested in the teaching actions, where the actors constitute a model that serves as a central element guide between these three indicated educational levels:

The teacher takes notes on her list:

*Teacher: I'm going to cross it out because a girl has already passed.*

One girl goes on to say something about February 14

*Teacher: We also marched.*

The teacher emphasizes what day it was:

*Teacher: it was on the 14th.*

*Ma: Was it Friday?*

The essential basis of the pedagogical practice is questions and answers, the expectation of transversality emerges from the context, where it is addressed to make way for the objective that is pursued, thus generating a social construction as an institutionalized entity in this school culture.

In elementary education, the procedures are shown in the following description of the practice:

The teacher tells the group to take out their coins:

*Teacher: those who brought their coins today, raise your hands so I can count you.*

The teacher replies:

*Teacher: that's ok, thank you.*

The teacher indicates that the activity is going well:

*Teacher: very well, very well.*

The teacher points out the product and the coins with which she pays, and they must say how much left there is:

*Teacher: Now we are doing this activity because we must see the amounts you need to complete a number, and you are going to tell me how much change you should give me.*

The methodological procedures are guided by the teacher based on the instructions that boost the realization of the activities, as well as reasoning questions to find the results.

In middle school education Math class, the teacher starts the class by noting the subject title on the board:

*Teacher: criteria of similarity of triangles.*

This action is considered by teachers as a normative process to opening the classroom scenario:

*Student: Three students at the front are waiting for the presentation to start.*

The students wait for the teacher to give them directions to start the class presentation.

*Teacher: Quiet! There will be teams of congruence and similarity, and you will win a point for your grade.*

The teacher explains what the rules of participation will be, so the students start with the indications given by the teacher:

*Student: begins to read the content of his sheet, referring to the criteria of similarity between the triangles to the students that are listening quietly, side-by-side criteria.*

The teacher's instructions, and the establishment of the participation rules allow to define the teaching and learning process. The following methodological guidelines can be seen in the middle school Geography class:

The teacher starts by presenting three questions to the group that will be answered according to the movie:

*Teacher: First question.*

First question:

*Teacher: What is the relationship between aquifers and the water cycle?*

The teacher explains what the answer to the question should contain:

*Teacher: How can you explain the earth's characteristics if it had another dimension?*

Next question:

*Teacher: Why is it important to know the temperature and climate, and what is it for?*

Third question:

*Teacher: What do you know about carnivorous plants?*

The teacher encourages them to search for the answers to the questions:

*Teacher: Ok, ready!*

The class is based on questions that will be answered by watching the movie, which aims to guide the class process. In the middle school Science II class, the teacher, who explains to the students about the temperature, answers himself:

*Teacher: -When I apply temperature to it, it is solid; then it is composed.*

Students stand up to signal that they want to participate:

The teacher continues with the class.

A student answers the question:

*Student: He says that by applying heat, the matter is transformed.*

The teacher clarifies:

*Teacher: There are three states of the matter*

The class keeps the following normative guidelines: the teacher's prompts and approaches that lead to the answers.

Teaching practice describes a complex scenario by the interactions that are lived where they are taking place, they contrast to reach the answers reformulated by the teacher.

In the pedagogical practice of preschool, teacher guidance persists through questions and answers, as well as the approaches that students attract to their immediate context, knowledge of the social and cultural context is noticed, a process that presents the interaction rules (Barros, 2014: 15).

The theme that the teacher addresses on February 14 allows us to notice a cultural context *in situ*, where students live a moment of relationship with the surrounding environment, giving meaning to the didactic process, that is, continuing to carry out a certain action that requires order, procedure, succession.

Teaching actions include a space of practice based on norms and principles of school culture that are constituted in particular norms, which means that each school can have a common and own character (Bolívar, 1996).

These procedures are part of a learning environment, comprised of schemes that make a practice of the context, seen as a didactic of learning for students and forms of teaching for teachers, where these procedures are basic for learning, that is, an established social order that develops the solution of the problem. School culture affirms a theoretical production, giving a social configuration for teaching practice.

In the practice of the elementary teacher, conducting the class through the use of the coins that are exchanged between the students, where they add and subtract, allows for ensuring the understanding of these operations.

According to Martínez (2008), learning is something recurring in people's lives as well as the construction of ways of living by participating in coexistence with others. Therefore, education is a social experience, in which since their childhood, a person gets to know themselves, enrich their relationships with others, acquiring and renew the bases of theoretical and practical knowledge (Delors, 1996: 19).

In middle school classes, methodological procedures generate communication processes that are established in the group and integrate argumentation, conflict, negotiation, and consensus, where explanations, exhibitions, and questions to students from the school culture that are permanently interrelated with social actors with stories and contexts of their own lives, integrate into the construction of the classroom culture; habits shared by its members structuring a school culture, a system determined by the traditions, techniques, and values that permeate teaching practice (Gimeno, 1988).

The relationships between the actors of the process allow us to notice that the teacher and the students establish a relationship of dependence, a communication is established that guides and allows regulating the students, they seek to be included in the relationship of the teaching and learning process, the production of their practices incorporate their thoughts, forming a set of schemes of perception, *habitus* in which students develop, because these sets of relations, says Bourdieu "are structures that contribute to the construction of the world of objects, they construct in practice a world of objects built according to contextual structures making possible the reproduction of culture in schools" (1980, 129-130). In this actors in the process relationship, they establish an ability to influence others, where the power that the teacher exercises is legitimated institutionally, not only because of the relationship between the teacher and the students but also the structuring of the identity of the two actors (Jackson, 1992; Delamont, 1985).

Existing social relations involve power relations with the use of the mechanisms, techniques, and ways used to obtain power in a relationship (Foucault, 1992). The teacher, in the relationship with students, aims to guide, lead, and influence the behavior of others, so educational situations are elements that shape the state in which the learning process occurs in the school (Delamont, 1985).

The cultural elements of teaching practice structure their ways of promoting work with students and proposals that shape the relationship between participants, their discourses constitute the *habitus* that structures the culture of the actors, through a process that includes particular initiatives along with empirical adaptations and appropriations of theoretical and normative proposals, transmitted collectively.

These representations of teachers and students have common aspects, a context where teachers are generating a school space in which students are integrated into rules of participation relationship regulated by the rules, this relationship between the actors in the process allows learning because the strength of this relationship is the essence of the pedagogical process (Delors, 1996).



In the case of the Sciences II subject in middle school, the teacher, at the beginning of the class reminds the students that he has asked them for the material, this relationship is manifested in a regulation constituted by learning environments where students anticipate the action and its consequences; that is to say, a *habitus* where the symbolic capital perceived by them as social agents whose categories of perception are such that they generate a normal daily space, where interaction conceived as a two-way process considers joint participation and active involvement of both participants, based not only on "a response to" but also on "an anticipation of". The two parties, therefore, intervene at the same time, externalizing their views, and manifesting the position of the other, which allows realities to be built that structure the way the class operates as a consequence of the interaction.

The pedagogical culture is organized according to value frames so that the management of the preschool group manifests ideas, emotions, acts, and attitudes because they possess qualities under which they are appreciated, desired, or recommended; students, especially at the stage of the socialization process, are led, consciously or unconsciously, by a didactic situation considered as an internal process of the group.

In a communication framed by praise and respect for others, the indications of the teacher show the goal pursued in teaching actions in the presentation of school content, ie, a situation of school organization that has a meaning; further designates a way of being, a habitual state, a tendency, a propensity or an inclination. (Bourdieu & Passeron, cited in Tenti Fanfani, 1981: 261).

In the elementary group, students express their characteristics learned in the family; the teacher also promotes the generation of value by supporting their peers when they need to solve their exercises in which they manifest doubts, a prevalent action within a social group.

Students' opinions establish the relationship with the social environment from which they extract information to give meaning, through reconstruction and interpretation and from the dominant culture, to the values instilled by the school according to the social origin of the actors, therefore the success of the students is established, by its greater facility to incorporate the values of the legitimated culture in the school.

The presence that forms the school culture is regulated by norms where the normative barriers generate the immediate spaces; scenarios that comprise a physical, emotional, and interrelated environment that occurs between actors, where explicit and implicit rules for the regulation of school coexistence are manifested.

Social interactions are regulated through rules that regulate the interpersonal relations of the group.

According to Stenhouse (1974), the direction of the classroom consists in conducting a set of activities of the subject that corresponds to the school

curriculum, where the norm marked as a discipline appears as a reference to allow the control of the group, which aims at driving the learning objectives towards obtaining cognitive processes.

The rules are present at all times and in all the actions of the teacher and students because all social practices are always defined by rules and in it, attitudes and behaviors, knowledge and ignorance, affections, thoughts, beliefs, and ideologies are always manifested.

For Dewey (1998: 45), "control consists in focusing impulses acting at the same time on some specific purpose and introducing an order of continuity in the succession of acts; mandates, prohibitions, approvals, and disapproval come from those of influencing the acts of students", so they acquire control in their actions, and these are adapting to what others do; however, the power of the teacher, from a critical perspective, can create in their students ways of resistance, contexts that contribute to obedience without reflection, reproductive elements of symbolic production processes.

The context of receiving indications makes the class an instituted environment in which, for the students it is the teacher who carries the responsibility of participation, and they only limit themselves to obey. This environment regulated by obedience and respect for indications is a traditional reproduction process.

The teaching culture without reflection is ritualized because of the central belief of pedagogical processes, where the symbolic language of the school environment generated by repetitive actions, has a high symbolic value in a given cultural environment. In this regard, McLaren (1995) states that the pistons generated in the school by the repetition of actions routinely become rituals; students' acts acquire control in their actions, and these are adapting to what others do; that is, the hidden domain of school culture, however, the power of the teacher from this perspective of ritual can create resistance in the learning environment.

The school as a social organization creates ritualistic, hidden, and intangible elements that gain strength in pedagogical practice and socializing elements of school culture. In this regard, McLaren (1995) states that behind each ritual there is a myth that symbolizes a central belief in culture, hence the rite ends up being a practice, in this way the teacher takes responsibility telling the students how to do the activities.

The teacher, when asking, gives indications to move from one state to another according to the purpose that she pursues in this sense, generates changes from one activity to another. Van (1986) considers that a rite is a social vision where it is assumed to be a step from one state to another, therefore, the actions of the teacher could generate a ritualistic siege in the space of teaching practice.

The middle school mathematics teacher takes attendance doing a marked ritual that gives certainty to what is manifested as the meaning of attendance where the presence and expression of being present manifest the existence of rights and obligations granted by spaces symbolic of the classroom.

According to Terrence and Kennedy (1982: 67), rituals offer a sense of security and a common identity and give meaning to classroom activities.

The Geography teacher addresses it by saying "guys" to which they reply greeting. The teaching practice carried out among the various teachers of the educational levels is a socializing process, where the ritual is integrated, that is, the fulfillment of daily duties, gives rise to a traditional situation between both educational levels, where these allow teachers to formalize their action, a socializing element with forms of attachment to tradition and stable behavior, which integrate the formal teaching action, prescribed to hidden and intangible elements of pedagogical practice, giving security to the teacher.

These actions consolidate a certain sense of order that is taking the form of a ritual, according to Terrence and Allan (1982: 67), a sense of security and identity is assigned, generating a corporate culture based on a crossover of elements such as history, values, beliefs, rituals, ceremonies, stories, heroic figures, and an informal cultural network.

#### THE CORPORATE CULTURE CREATED FROM THE CLASSROOM RITUALS

The culture created is a product of the appropriations and empirical adaptations contained in a corporate teaching practice, where teachers put into play the teaching process where they have been linked to the search for learning results. The complex world of school involves teaching practice in a culture, through a process that includes particular initiatives, appropriations, and empirical adaptations of theoretical and normative proposals and transmitted in a corporate way (Fraile, 2015).

The practice carried out in preschool, elementary and middle school, on top of starting from instructions, questions, and answers as a way to process information, is teachers' work as social actors who contribute to the reproduction and perpetuation of traditions that become rituals that are permeated in the school culture, which allows putting into play its professional symbolic capital, where the personality of the teacher establishes the relationship between the actors of the process; "cultural capital as known and recognized" (Bourdieu; 1987, 160).

The categories of perception are to receive the indications and adhere to them, to follow the forms that the group maintains to show that it has learned, ie a series of meanings that allow the construction of those realities of school culture, where practice supports the relational concepts of the

*habitus* necessary for entry into a particular cultural field. They are considered mental and practical schemes, resulting from the incorporation of objective social visions and divisions that configure principles of difference and belonging to certain fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1995).

This aural space, with all its forms of relationship of social actors, allows giving meaning to the perceptions of students and teachers where traditional patterns give security to their practice, actions that concretize the symbolic capital of the classroom, giving value to these categories of perception (Bourdieu, 1994d).

The list of actors is linked to the classroom strategies that include all practices aimed at the production and reproduction of the students' life, where the strategies of social reproduction in this regard (Bourdieu, 2006, 122) expresses that this is "a [...] a set of phenomenally different practices through which students and teachers consciously or unconsciously tend to preserve or increase their heritage and correlatively maintain or improve their position in the structure of class relations".

McLaren (1995) states that the classroom rituals, instruction rituals, have the consistency of individual classes that take place daily in classrooms in which tasks and attendance have multiple meanings, to obtain a note generated by the transmission of the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2006).

McLaren (1995) says in this regard that classroom practice is associated with motivation and school performance; where the rituals of intensification, are emotionally reinforced by adding to these actions the teacher's authority where the mediated decisions of the activities to be carried out, how and when they will be carried out, use some subtle procedures to sanction behavior that is inappropriate for the teacher.

As for the rules, each school presents a culture where its methods and practices shape the practice of teachers who define its *habitus*-generating practices and differentiated ways of perceiving others.

The "cultural consciousness" according to Cohen (1982), expresses a recognition of us, this is the first statement of school culture, a product of a historical past where invented traditions appear that are a series of practices normally governed by rules accepted in an explicit way and of a ritual or symbolic nature that aims to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior through repetition (Habsbanw, 1983: 1).

The school within its classrooms aims to become spaces in which silence dominates, administered by a figure of authority focused on the teacher, who has ownership and power over the classroom. The school is shown as an organization anchored in tradition, which feels comfortable and safe when supported by ritualistic practices that recognize that they have worked to control the group. Elements that have been generated in teaching practice and that have been amalgamated giving life to school culture

and that we have analyzed here, which are: Procedures, values, norms, and rituals, these belong to a field, according to Bourdieu (2003), is a system of social positions that are related, that is in this field.

It allows the interaction of some elements that depend on others, they interact with each other, they are not isolated from each other, according to Runge, Klaus, Gaviria, and Alejandro (2010), the field is dynamic, flexible, social, and historical, therefore a field is "[... ] a particular system of objective relations that can be of alliance or conflict, of concurrence or cooperation between different positions, socially defined and instituted, independent of the physical existence of the agents that occupy it" (Moreno, 2003: 16).

This allows focusing the elements of culture, that is, they belong to a field forming a structure because this is the arrangement and order of the parts within a whole. It is also understood as a system of coherent linked concepts, whose objective is to clarify the essence of the object of study (Hernández, 2012).

The elements of culture, as procedures that make up the teaching practice that is required to promote learning, are actions that are considered valuable classroom outcomes, structured institutionally, therefore, they become the center of the pedagogical culture in these schools.

In this context, the teaching practice imposes the rituals that in each school are established as a pattern of behavior reinforced by the actors of the school processes, that is to say, a series of customs that mark the practice of how things are done that are settled and naturalized. Another element of culture are the rules that go hand in hand with the central process and that are confused with procedures and norms in which the procedures come to an end, continue the covert elements of the procedures as are the values, which refer to what they should do according to the teacher's instructions and what they should not do to achieve through the procedures, the aims that are pursued, that is, what the teacher believes is "good", "correct" or "desirable". They reflect, as (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1999) says.

In this dynamic, processes, values, norms, and rituals make up a terrain, Bourdieu's theory of fields (2003) allows for reconstructing the frames and configurations of the production of knowledge, in other words, the disciplinary and professional field of pedagogy becomes its own (Runge & Muñoz, 2012).

The above highlights the theory of fields as a space for the construction and reconstruction of pedagogical knowledge; therefore, the school is a mediating element between culture and the learning processes, recognizing the spaces of socialization, construction, and development of traditional knowledge.

García (1999: 83) points out that identity is understood as a link of qualities, experiences, signs, and situations of the social environment that allow a subject to differentiate a particular individual or a particular social

group because culture is the informal code that states "how we do things here" (Bower, 1966).

The school's organization is a culture, understood as a system of meanings and the result of social interactions between actors because it represents the identity of the actors (Smircich, 1983: 347-348).

Therefore, the pedagogical field is; "[... ] the discipline that conceptualizes, applies, and experiences the knowledge related to the teaching of the sciences exhibition, as well as to the exercise of knowledge in the interiority of a culture" (Zuluaga *et al.* 2003: 111).

So, what is done in schools and that shapes the school culture is an anthropological phenomenon generated by praxis as human and transformative, to approach the understanding of formative educational practice as a basic aspect within the context of joint human and social praxis (Benner, 1996).

Therefore, the elements of culture presented here are a field shaped as human praxis, which is fed back by school culture, the result of the corporatist formation of the social context.

## CONCLUSIONS

The goals of education of the 21st century are presented as spaces for resistance because schools form a school culture where its elements are pedagogical methodologies, relationships between actors, rituals, and norms, integrate the identity that surrounds the social environment where culture forms the system of meanings resulting from social interactions between the actors that drive a field shaping a structure of arrangement and order of the parts within a whole.

The observations made allow us to construct this theoretical approach where it is explained that schools have as a resistant shell to the attacks of the aims of education, the culture they have built, and that explains the way of doing their practice in their reproductive function within their scenarios where their symbolic capital operates built by the plots and configurations of the production of a culture integrated to a field of its own.

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