

EDUCATIONAL METHODOLOGY: INCIDENCE IN STUDENTS' APATHY TOWARDS SOCIAL SCIENCES

Erica Tatiana Garavito Campillo (Colombia)

erikcampillo@hotmail.com

Master's Degree in Education
Universidad de Cordoba

Maria de Jesus Gonzalez Martinez (Colombia)

mariagonzalezm10@gmail.com

Bachelor in Social Sciences
Universidad de Cordoba

Received: August 10th, 2015

Evaluated: October 5th, 2017

Accepted: November 2nd, 2017

How to reference this article?

Garavito, E. y Gonzalez, M. (2017). Educational Methodology: Incidence in Students' Apathy Towards Social Sciences. *Panorama* 11(20), p. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15765/pnrm.v11i21.1049>.

Abstract

This document is the result of a research on the influence of the teacher's methodology on students' uninterested behavior towards social sciences. To this end, student's behavior, teacher's methodology and perceptions of both teachers and students about this methodology are analyzed; also, relations between this

and student motivation are established based on motivation and teaching style theories of authors such as Louis Not and Carlos Enrique Cajamarca, among others. It is a qualitative ethnographic research, conducted in the Educational Institution Santa Rosa de Lima, located in Monteria in the department of Cordoba, Colombia. The population under study was represented by school actors of the educational institution, and the sample comprised tenth-graders. Students were found to be apathetic towards an eminently monotonous methodology, in a context where teacher-student perceptions differ.

Key Words: educational methodology, motivation, teaching, behavior, apathy

Introduction

Education is a continuous process inherent to the human being. Since birth, humans find themselves in a situation of constant learning that allows them to acquire knowledge on their reality or essential knowledge to develop skills and satisfy needs; this is why it can be said that education is the necessary complement to every aspect of life. Currently, globalization processes and postmodernity changes have modified the role of education in schools regarding the students: shifting from a teacher-focused education to a student-focused education, which has resulted in certain phenomena that negatively influence the teaching-learning process, such as apathy, causing the student to show lack interest or motivation to situations taking place within the educational process. This is an expanding phenomenon: inexplicably, students are not interested in studying, new technologies and transformations regarding the future role of education might have an effect on this scenario.

However, the educational process is made up of several actors, therefore it is not possible to hold only one accountable since the teacher-student-family-society dynamic plays a critical role, the correspondence between them is very important in the training processes and emphasis must be placed on those with direct activities in the classroom, meaning, teachers and students. It must be said that the former may exercise a strong influence on the interests of the latter; in terms of knowledge introduced in the classroom, perhaps the teaching model or method may be responsible for the students' educational development.

Oftentimes, it is necessary to understand and analyze the sociocultural context underlying the educational process, as well as its influencing factors. Thus, the teaching-learning process in Colombia has been subject to a series of processes that have led to students' apathetic attitudes, for instance, the implementation of educational policies that indirectly encourage students' disregard; relying in a more extensive and pertinent conceptual universe may contribute to a better use of procedures and to the creation of new ones, to the integration of data to information systems and to better retention.

Consequently, and as an example, the students of the Educational Institution Santa Rosa de Lima in Monteria show several apathetic attitudes that include factors such as lack of attention, distraction, failure to do assigned work, etc. It must be said that these factors do not appear out of nowhere and that their causes may be due to the fact that most students come from families with insufficient economic resources, that are disintegrated, or worse, with domestic violence background (which can seriously affect interpersonal relationships and indirectly the educational aspect, since difficulties in establishing relationships with other actors in the school environment tend to create a negative idea about school chores, which reflects in lack of interest in learning). On the other hand, the teacher's role must also be considered, since he/she is in charge of being a mediator between students and knowledge; the latter is especially relevant,

teachers have the largest responsibility in students' learning, and they exercise it by applying diverse teaching methods.

Thus, we aim to provide answers to the following objectives: describing students behavior in class and the context in which classes take place; describing the methodology applied by the teachers in Social Sciences classes; establishing the perception of students and teachers regarding class' methodology; and lastly, identifying if a relation between the classes and the students' lack of interest towards the class exists.

Theoretical Fundamentals

Learning Theories on Motivation

A series of elements that are important for its analysis revolve around educational chores. Some of these elements occur in the classroom and are directly or indirectly connected with the performing educational actors that are present (teacher-student), and their joint trait consists on contributing to the educational process. Such is the case, e.g., of the methodology applied by the teacher in class; in general, teaching methodologies refer to teaching, since their objectives include students assimilating knowledge, practice and aptitude programs, for which a series of methods and strategies are developed through the interaction of three elements: a teacher, one or more students and the object of knowledge.

Yet, discussing apathy seems complicated in theoretical terms because unfortunately it is not within the scope of any theory. The problem begins with the term apathy in itself, which refers to a mood of internal nature related to lack of motivation to undertake an action; apathy is the result of interest mirrored to a situation, meaning, it is an adaptation of the negative form of motivation (understood as the drive to do something) (Valentini, 2008).

Theories about motivation do exist, according to Valenzuela (2007) "School motivation has to do more concretely with the activation of cognitive resources in order to learn the school's proposed learning" (quoted in Valenzuela, Muñoz, Silva, Gomez and Precht, 2015).

Garcia (2008) is helpful as well by asking the following question about the factors that negatively influence motivation: why are some students motivated to learn and some aren't? Concluding that many factors influence each student in terms of motivation and his/her learning in the classroom: family, personal relationships, society. Likewise, parents' permissive and undemanding attitude, an inclination to leave education and transmission of values to educational centers and difficult family situations are also discussed.

According to Martinez and Sanchez (s.f.) "It is the student's interest on his/her own learning or on activities conducive to learning. Interest may be acquired, sustained or increased in function of intrinsic or extrinsic elements"; although the environment, teacher and family create conditions and help or hinder motivation, it is the result of a personal process that leads to the decision of learning. The motivations that drive human behavior vary depending on the human being's age and maturity.

Theories on Teaching Style and Corresponding Teaching Methods

In the educational sphere, method "Implies a series of steps or stages that are systematically organized in a sequence of time. In that regard, the method is equivalent to an order, therefore, it is associated with the concept of procedure" (Universidad de las Americas, 2015, p. 5). This develops within a specific context that has particular needs to consider and that greatly determines the use of a methodology or another by the teacher; the educator must not spare efforts to awaken the students' interest regarding the topic: it is key for each student to

participate in different ways in the class activities, to really be an active subject that constructively contributes to the class itself.

Garcia (2008) states that the teacher's methodology must be active and avoid extensive oral presentations, and on the contrary, achieve student participation throughout the program, trying to accompany the teacher's interventions by those of the students' and undertaking activities.

Regarding teachers' methodology, Not (1998) refers to two of them: the method of hetero-structuring, part of the traditional teaching field, which faces inconveniences due to the fact that teaches topics according to the teacher's considerations and knowledge is organized from the outside, thus, education is sort of a graft of external production that is bound to shape the student; the other is the method of self-structuring, in which the student is more self-sufficient and the teacher simply accompanies and steers the processes. Hence, there is a need to implement a third method that synthesizes them both: inter-structuring.

Methodology

Type of Study

This research is qualitative because it intends to explain a contextual situation (students' apathy and the influence of the methodology applied by the teacher) and interpret it from information obtained in reality, not from hypotheses. Consequently, an ethnographic study was conducted aimed at "Describing and analyzing what people in a determined place, socioeconomical level or context usually do, as well as the meaning given to that behavior undertaken in common or special circumstances" (Alvarez-Gayou, 2003, quoted by Sampieri, 2006, p. 697). The researcher tries to collect this information with the insight of actors "inside" the group; the nature of this study is eminently descriptive, although it seeks to interpret, understand and analyze the meaning provided to things by people.

Population

The target population of this study was represented by school actors of the Educational Institution Santa Rosa de Lima in Monteria. The sample was selected following the intentionality criterion; (30) tenth-graders of the secondary education level of the Institution were selected, aged between 15 and 18. The selection criterion basically took into account that this is an educated population, transitioning to a new educational level (from middle school to secondary education) and that are prone to being shocked by the new subjects (philosophy, economics, political systems). The analysis unit were the students and the teacher of the Social Sciences area in charge of the class.

Information Collection Strategies

These strategies are largely determined by the type of qualitative research, therefore, to conduct this study, collection methods such as systematic observation in different stages or moments were used, applying an observation guide as tool; said observation requires attention to details, occurrences, events and interactions. Besides, in several occasions, it implies going deeper into social situations while keeping an active role and permanent reflection.

Research Stages

The draft was built in the first stage, it consisted of the identification and description of the research problem aimed at analyzing how the teacher's methodology influences apathetic behaviors in the students, to then propose some objectives, which will be complied with throughout the project; also, the background and theoretical references that support this work were established: learning theories on motivation and theories on teachers' methodology. These led to the methodological framework, which allowed to define the type of study and target population, a qualitative sample with sensible character. This stage also comprised the type of techniques and instruments to be used in the collection of information; coherently,

the analysis strategy of information triangulation was proposed, which consisted of relating the information collected by the investigative unit through observation, teachers and students' perceptions about the same event and the research's theoretical references.

In the second stage, the instruments became operational by being timely applied, with the intention of collecting the information needed to develop the objectives set out in this research. This stage allowed to describe the students' behavior in class. Likewise, it facilitated the description of the teachers' methodology in the class context, a process that was conducted by observing each event in the session's development inside the classroom.

The previous exercise was complemented by looking into what was proposed in the specific objectives concerning the teachers and students' perceptions on the teachers' methodology; semi-structured interviews, with questions or matters on the study's target problem, were used in this context. It was noted at this point that the researcher that applies this type of techniques and instruments has the liberty to introduce additional questions to clarify concepts, go deeper into some answers given by the informant and/or obtain more information.

It is pertinent to clarify that, due to the nature of some of the matters, a semi-structured interview guide was used to underpin some data that was worth closed treatment, for instance, those situations in which it was necessary to simply log if the class grammar was fulfilled or not, to the extent that the teachers' methodology largely determines the processes that take place in the session, unlike other data which, due to its descriptive nature, must be generated in discourse.

Finally, the fourth stage presented the conclusions and (contribution-wise) offers a proposal based on the results of the research.

The analysis technique, as mentioned before, was a triangulation of information collected from the informants that were part of the study's sample, along with the theoretical references of the research. An exercise to make analysis categories operational was conducted to sort the large volume of information into sub-

categories. This facilitated the information analysis from the point of view of the theories that were used as reference in the research.

The aforementioned organization was materialized in the use of matrixes. Initially, the information was recorded in grids that allowed to identify different points of view of the actors involved in the study, protecting their identity, as it is typical of qualitative research. Conventions that allowed to quote the informants and triangulate their perceptions on the phenomena, along with the observation registrations, were used in the consequent analysis.

Analysis of Results

This section pertains to the information analysis conducted. It takes into account the behavior exhibited by students in the classes, the methodology applied by the teacher and the existing relation between both. From the students' point of view, uninterested, negative and distraction behaviors are reasserted. "**E1** is distracted by looking through the door, **E6** is looking at what the investigative unit is writing down" (RO2: E1, E6; p. 114, L: 13-16). "**E7** disassembles the cellphone and scratches it with a pen, **E16** writes while the explanation takes place, is behind on the notes since he/she is copying in another notebook" (RO2: E16, E17; p. 115, L: 40-43). "**E8** and **E9** are laughing a lot, they are also hitting themselves, which makes them laugh" (RO2: E8, E9; p. 116 L: 60-62). "**E12** looks at the time and frown" (RO6: E12; p. 127, L:24-25). The situation is representative of the study's target problem (students' apathy), if we consider that this is the way in which almost all the Social Sciences classes ensue in the 10°3 grade at the Educational Institution Santa Rosa de Lima.

Levels of apathy, defined as a lack of focus or disregard towards school activities, are such that they translate into negative behavior (a highly symptomatic conduct); with this in mind, the teacher states that the students engage in permanent conversation and even hit each other. In terms of lack of focus, the teacher reports

that the students frequently look at their cell phones in class; in a different context, the teacher reiterates: looking at the cellphone is probably the most critical attitude that encourages disturbances to the classroom. "The teacher tells **E7** off for being distracted, teacher tells **E1** off for being distracted with the headphones, however, **E1** does not take them off" (RO4: E7, E1; p. 121, L: 7-11); also, students are not interested in the classes or fail to engage in the activities developed in the classes: "**E14** scratches the notebook and is not interested in class" (RO4: E14; p. 122, L: 22-23); "**G5** laughs and does not read the material" (RO4: G5; p.123, 97, L: 46-47).

From the theoretical point of view, to an extent, learning is determined by the class' environment and by the type of interactions taking place between the teacher and the student. Regardless of other factors that also intervene in students' learning, cognitive psychology refers us to the structural relationships of learning. In particular, Not (1998) proposes a synthesis between hetero-structuring and auto-structuring, rescuing the relevance given to structures in the traditional model (expressed by hetero-structuring), and the significance given to individual representations (meaning, to the student's perspective) in auto-structuring; said synthesis is called inter-structuring.

The last part of the former reference soundly explains the teachers' problem, his/her methodology is not driving significance in students' learning, it fails to offer enough spaces for student-teacher interaction, even more, the teacher is not even aware that he/she is faced with a learning problem that might be generated by a monotonous and repetitive methodology, on the contrary, he/she points the finger at students as the cause of the problem. There is no questioning the students' attention and there is no intention to regulate the behavior of which the students are accused of within the routine processes of the class.

Students' Behavior

Speaking of the behavior exhibited by students in the classroom and in the development of the sessions, a factor that is essential to understand it must be taken into account: the motivation factor, defined by the theory as the internal drive that induces the student to decide to build his/her own learning, to do what he/she is doing with enthusiasm (Cajamarca, 1994). Hence, it is said that a student's motivation level determined his/her behavior in class. Therefore, the mission is to make students build an interest in the class and feel pleasure in studying the subject, to encourage them to learn and to translate their behavior into an enabler to learning. Consequently, it can be said that the students' behavior is proof of their level of motivation, a reflection of it.

Judging by the aforementioned statements, it can be said that although some students participate and pay attention, they do not constitute the majority, overall, distraction and uninterested behaviors are predominant in class. According to the teacher, the behavior may be explained by different factors (internal or external) that depend on the student's context, thus, the behavior may originate in the family environment of the students; which is why it seems necessary for the teacher to gain more knowledge on this aspect in order to avoid wrongful pedagogic procedures (without leaving aside a possible responsibility in the problem) by only executing his/her task when some students exhibit certain behaviors, instead of acting as an agent that may exercise some influence over them.

Context in the Classroom

Apathetic Behavior

As stated before, motivation is an important component that shapes students' behavior in class. For instance, if a student has little motivation it is likely that he/she will not engage in the class' programmed activities, will not be open to what is being taught, will not pay attention and show uninterest, which in turn constitute proof of apathetic behavior.

Apathy may be defined as the lack of concentration or disregard towards school activities by students. Although many factors may favor it, it is proposed that routine may be one of its causes because the student stops creating expectations as to what will happen in the classroom, students get used to the “same” and this situation may trigger indifference in students.

For the case of this research, the observations led to a perception that several behaviors illustrate students' apathy towards Social Sciences, some of the most common findings were: lack of interest in the class or failure to engage in the activities developed in class. These attitudes are clearly visible and cause the teacher's reaction, who regularly scolds them or gives them the chance to leave the classroom.

It is unfortunate that a space intended to provide the tools needed to strengthen students' skills and to contribute to their theoretical training becomes a place for other activities that seem more attractive, such as looking at the cellphone, or through which the student gets the attention of the rest of the students, without thinking that he/she might alter the course of the class, as it often happens when a joke or a funny remark is told.

Teacher's Methodology

In order to correctly analyze the classroom context in the development of the classes, it is necessary to take a look at the methodology applied by the teacher. Firstly, Cajamarca (1994) says that it is clear that the teacher must not be repetitive, must innovate and keep the students' needs in mind, taking their interest into account when addressing studying; all of this is required to sustain an adequate level of motivation.

According to the information collected in the observations and interviews, it was established that classes have an explanation of the topic, which includes questions, most students state that the explanation of the topic has an important place in each class. In terms of the activities developed in class, it can be said that

the teacher resorts to group work, but the strategy is the same as before, group set up follows the explanation. It is important to add that the teacher supplies the material for the class and is attentive to students' doubts.

In other words, the methodology is always the same: the teacher uses group work for the development of the classes, copies including a workshop are handed after an explanation, which must be finished in class (if there is not enough time, the workshop must be finished in the next class), students know what is going to happen in class and that is where the problem is, monotony tends to be an enemy of the school process, it hinders students' expectations regarding the class and contributes to decreased motivation.

Perceptions of School Actors Regarding Teaching Methodology

As it is known, the school environment connects several actors that enable the development of academic activities, specifically, students and teachers come together in the classroom, each with clear roles and responsibilities regarding knowledge acquisition. Consequently, it is important to get to know the perceptions that both actors have in terms of the methodology applied by the teacher. The teacher is responsible for using an adequate teaching method dependent on the cognitive needs and skills of the students. Method refers to the way in which the teacher organizes contents and decides how to teach; theoretically speaking, there are three general systems or points of view in which methods may be classified and that were extensively developed by Not (1998): hetero-structuring, self-structuring and inter-structuring. The first adheres to traditional thinking, the second is within the field of contemporary didactics and the third suggests a synthesis between the other two; it does not advocate for repetitive or memory-based learning, but for that which entails significance, fosters skills and not just knowledge.

Perceptions of the Students

In order to establish the students' point of view about the methodology used by the teachers in class, the first thing was to inquire on their perception of the classes; in that sense, the interview-based inquiry allowed to establish that in the students' opinion classes are boring (B.B.A: Boredom Brain Attack): "*B.B.A. Boredom Brain Attack, the truth is we are developing teenagers, we like to be active and listening to a teacher talk about ancient history is exhausting, the teacher fails at making us interested in the class, and he/she does not change the method, class plan, which would be better for our learning process*" (RE1: E13; p.130, L: 53-60). Students define Social Sciences class as not interesting compared to other classes, they say it is not an active class: it is more like an annoying moment of awkward stillness; a dynamic class is demanded by students in order to pay attention, if it is not there, then it is not worth it. It is interesting that the student mentions that the class is not as active as it should be, which implies that the problem is not the topic of the class, but the way in which it is developed.

Students directly relate the way in which the class is regarded with the way in which the teacher manages and how he/she addresses the students, they are mutually dependent. In other words, when the teacher fails to show certain type of emotion about the topic, the students detect it and it is "contagious", making the students want to sleep in class.

Students think classes are boring and they associate this notion with class monotony, therefore their behavior in the classroom reflects it, and according to the observations, behavior in the classroom is ruled by distractions and conversations among students; frequently, they ask for dynamism and innovation. Other students consider the class to be good or interesting and give more importance to content than to development. Theoretically, it can be stated that most students' perception of the teacher's methodology is framed within the hetero-structuring method, as

follows: *"We are stuck in the basics, every year we are involved in this monotony and fail to exercise our knowledge"* (RE1: E5; p. 129, L: 20-24).

Perceptions of the Teacher

Teachers were asked to describe their methodology in order to establish their perception. From there, it can be said that the teacher uses the same methodology in class. It must be acknowledged that the class is mediated by questions asked to the students depending on the topic being worked on and enticing their participation, but overall, the way in which the teacher develops the class resorts to the same activities, it was observed that after an explanation, students are asked to group together and copies of a workshop are handed, which must be finished in class (if there is not enough time, the workshop is not finished). It was also observed that the teacher uses document transcription as a class activity; it is clear that the methodology applied is always the same, and this drives the students' unfavorable perception of the class. However, the teacher does not think the same: his/her class description matched what the students considered monotonous and boring, but there is no mention of the fact that this structure may cause the students' apathetic behavior. In other words, there is no inconvenient in conducting the classes in this way, classes are even considered effective.

Some aspects related to methods used by the teacher to conduct a class, which influence the students' lack of interest

Firstly, according to Garcia (2008), teacher's methodology must be active, avoiding extensive oral presentations and encouraging active participation by students throughout what has been programmed, trying to accompany the teacher's presentations with students' participation, and undertaking class activities, this is how to achieve a correct motivation of the students.

Due to the essential role of teacher's methodology inside the classroom work, we began by considering its incidence on the appearance of students' apathetic behavior. So, the methodology applied by the teacher in class was observed,

leading to the finding that this rarely changes, which is why students believe the class is boring and mention its lack of dynamism. Consequently, students react with behavior that shows apathy towards the Social Sciences area.

Conclusions

In this research work, aimed at analyzing the influence of teachers' methodology in apathetic behavior towards Social Sciences by students in 10°3 grade in the Educational Institution Santa Rosa de Lima, we have intended to place the transcendence of students' motivation over the class' development, since this is the aspect on which classroom behavior depends.

The description of the phenomena was conducted based on observations in each stage and in moments during the Social Sciences class in the 10°3 grade, as well as on students and teachers' perceptions alike regarding the methodology used by the latter in the class execution. In this context, the following was established:

- Behavior exhibited by the students in the development of the classes is strongly steered by characteristics of the apathy phenomena, which is the lack of concentration or disregard for school activities. It is the main result of lack of motivation in the students; according to Cajamarca (1994), motivation is an internal drive that makes the student decide to build his/her own learning. Most students failed to exhibit motivation, which was clear from the behavior adopted in class.
- This behavior takes place in a context of monotony in terms of class structure, which also fails to introduce innovation to the teacher's didactic strategies. This is paramount, since current theories recommend approaching an active methodology and staying away from memorization and from learning that is foreign to the student's reality; unfortunately, those were elements were in the findings of this study.

- As a response to the aforementioned monotony, most students think the class is boring and fail to have expectations before getting to the classroom, they are just not motivated to do it. Cajamarca explains this fact arguing that it is necessary to consider human development characteristics; also, it is only possible to motivate students to the extent they assume learning as personal success, becoming aware of what they have learned. This is not what is happening in this situation.

- There is a reciprocal relationship between the motivation showed by students in class and the methodology used by the teacher, meaning the students' willingness towards the class facilitates or deters its development as planned, while said planning, or methodology, greatly determines students' motivation and attitude towards what they are being taught.

Yet, although the teacher acknowledges students do not have motivation in the classroom, he/she does nothing to capture their attention, failing to make an effort in trying new ways, methodologies or didactic strategies to positively affect the students' behavior and motivate them to learn.

References

1. Alves de Mattos, L. (2008). *Compendio de didáctica general*. Buenos Aires: Xapelusz.
2. Alvarez-Gayou, J. (2003). *Cómo hacer investigación cualitativa: Fundamentos y Metodología*. México: Paidós.
3. Cajamarca, C. (1994). *Aprender a educarse, a ser y a obrar*. Bogotá: Editora Géminis Ltda.
4. García, F. (2008). *Motivar para el aprendizaje desde la actividad orientadora*. Madrid: Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, UAM.
5. Not, L. (1998). *Las Pedagogías del Conocimiento*, México: FCE.

6. Oyague, M. (2004). Rol del maestro en la investigación educativa, *Umbral, Revista de Educación, Cultura y sociedad*, FACHSE, (6)
7. Proyecto Educativo Institucional (PEI) (2015), Institución Educativa Santa Rosa de Lima, Malambo
8. Tinajero, L. (2008). *Desmotivación en el aula y fracaso escolar en España desde la psicología de la educación*. Universidad Pedagógica de Olavide.
9. Universidad de las Américas. (2015). *Guía de métodos y estrategias de enseñanza y aprendizaje*. Unidad de Gestión Curricular: Santiago. Recuperado de: <http://www.udla.cl/portales/tp9e00af339c16/uploadImg/File/PlanesDeEstudio/Guia-metodos-y-estrategias-UDLA-11-08-15.pdf>
10. Valentini, R. (2010). *Reflexiones sobre el fenómeno de la apatía en ámbitos escolares*. Recuperado de: <http://www.educar.org>
11. Sampieri, R. (2004). *Metodología de la Investigación*. México: McGrawHill.
12. Valenzuela, Muñoz, Silva, Gómez y Precht (2015). Motivación escolar: claves para la formación motivacional de futuros docentes. *Estudios Pedagógicos*, 41(1). Recuperado de: <http://www.scielo.cl/pdf/estped/v41n1/art21.pdf>