



Service- learning enactment in International Baccalaureate Schools in Argentina

Aprendizaje-servicio en escuelas argentinas de Bachillerato Internacional

ib **Dra. Liliana Mayer** is a researcher at CONICET with a headquarter in Universidad Nacional de Misiones (Argentina) (lizmayer@gmail.com) (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7364-4048>)

ib **Lic. Wanda Perozzo-Ramírez** is a PhD student at Universidad Nacional de La Plata (Argentina) (wperozzo79@hotmail.com) (<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2763-5113>)

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Abstract

The article analyzes the ways in which service-learning (SL) projects in schools in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, Argentina delivering the Diploma Program (DP) of the International Baccalaureate (IB). Through a qualitative study, which combines in-depth interviews with institutional agents, documentary analysis and classroom observations in state and private schools affiliated to the Program, the different senses of the activities that students, teachers and authorities carry out for the CAS component of the DP are investigated. The results of the study show dissimilar conclusions. When it comes to private schools associated with middle and upper-middle sectors, the SL projects appear oriented towards social action or service, aimed at reducing the deficits of a third party. On the contrary, when it comes to state schools, where students have socioeconomic profiles that are closer to the beneficiaries of those of the private schools, they manage to transcend this orientation to achieve tangible or intangible community assets. This disadvantaged profile is a reason for some state institutions to cancel SA projects that transcend specific and material solidarity actions. The article deduces the importance of institutional agents in the promotion of these projects: although these are spaces, where young people are the protagonists, the framing, empowerment or restriction for their realization will depend on adults, their knowledge, predisposition and valuation regarding SL as pedagogy and practice.

Keywords: Service Learning (SL), educational inequalities, cosmopolitanism, internationalization, school management, International Baccalaureate.

Resumen

El artículo analiza los modos en que se realizan proyectos de aprendizaje-servicio (ApS) en el marco del Programa Diploma (PD) del Bachillerato Internacional (IB) en el área metropolitana de Buenos Aires, Argentina. A través de un estudio cualitativo, que combina entrevistas en profundidad a agentes institucionales, análisis documental y observaciones de clase en escuelas estatales y privadas, se indaga en los diversos sentidos de las actividades que estudiantes, docentes y directivos realizan para el componente Creatividad, Acción y Servicio (CAS) del PD. Los resultados del trabajo muestran conclusiones disímiles, cuando se trata de escuelas privadas asociadas a públicos de sectores medios y medios-altos, el ApS aparece orientado a la acción o servicio social, destinado a mermar déficits de un tercero. Por el contrario, cuando se trata de escuelas estatales, donde los estudiantes tienen perfiles socioeconómicos más cercanos a los beneficiarios de las escuelas privadas, logran trascender dicha orientación para lograr bienes comunitarios, tangibles o intangibles. Este perfil desventajado es motivo en algunas instituciones estatales para cancelar proyectos de ApS que trasciendan acciones solidarias puntuales y materiales. Del artículo se deduce la importancia de los agentes institucionales en la promoción de estos proyectos: si bien se trata de espacios donde los jóvenes son los protagonistas, el encuadre, habilitación o restricción para su realización dependerá de los adultos, de sus conocimientos, predisposición y valoración respecto del ApS como pedagogía y práctica.

Descriptor: Aprendizaje-servicio, desigualdades, internacionalización, cosmopolitanismo, gestión educativa, Bachillerato Internacional.

1. Introduction

Studies of educational processes in Argentina agree in fragmentation (Tiramonti, 2004) as a feature of the educational field in the country, related to the subsystems that make up state and private schools. These studies (Braslavsky, 1985), address educational segmentation related to deinstitutionalization processes (Dubet & Martuccelli, 1999) and loss of symbolic effectiveness of institutions (Mayer, 2009), as a result of the impacts of globalization on the education system, and of transformations in local educational legislation that decentralized institutions, agents and participants. Such fragmentation allows to recognize the social and educational space as areas without reference to a whole. Each fragment is transmitted as a boundary of reference, an institutional aggregate with common normative and cultural references.

In this context of the loss of symbolic effectiveness of certain patterns, it is noticed the proliferation of educational projects linked to the global world (Mayer, 2020), which respond to the incidence of global education speeches, the shift toward pro-market education, and reconfigurations of national and local educational policy. According to Beech and Barrenechea (2011), Argentina is seen as a black swan in the implementation of programs linked to internationalization, because of its educational tradition, and because of its resistance of such ideas by the actors involved — trade unions. Thus, part of the institutions that adhere to these narratives belong to the private sphere, since they have more autonomy and other institutional actors are involved (Larrondo & Mayer, 2018; Mayer, 2020). Thus, there were spaces that could not be adapted, while others opened spaces where foreign speeches and practices were installed. According to Ball and Youdell (2008), the Argentine case would correspond to the case of exogenous privatization of the education system, alluding to specific components that adopted logic toward privatization but not for profit.¹

These lines delimit the context and features in which international programs and agencies are inserted in Argentina (Beech, 2011).

This is the case of the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO), which offers several programs to schools around the world, with the Diploma Program (DP) being the most popular. It constitutes a program for the last two years of high school that, once approved, is universally recognized, allowing automatic entry to a diversity of universities in the world. To offer DP, schools go through arduous internal audit and enforcement processes; and this applies, in particular, to private schools that decide to apply. State schools, which adhere to different modalities in our continent (Beech et al., 2019; Resnik, 2015, 2016; Bunnell, 2008; Doherty et al., 2012), do it so through framework agreements between the judicial educational authorities and the IBO. For both cases, these agreements guarantee that the program will contemplate the dictation of seven subjects, having as mandatory Language and Mathematics, Theory of knowledge, the elaboration of a final monograph after a two-year research work, and the development of the CAS component in which students perform certain certified activities that grant enough credits to complete the DP.

The CAS component is included in the SL, understood as pedagogical service projects integrated into the curriculum, in which students apply, verify and deepen school learning by contributing to the solution of a community problem. SL, as a pedagogical practice, applies disciplinary concepts to specific spaces and problems, offering levels of community development to the local communities (Furco, 2002; Castillo et al., 2007; Tapia, 2017, 2018).

Argentina has 61 schools that offer the DP, ten of which are state schools. Private schools are mostly located in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires (AMBA) and correspond, beyond their heterogeneity, to elite institutions (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986; Kahn-Raman, 2010). State- schools, excepting one in the province of



Buenos Aires, are located in the City of Buenos Aires (CABA), and accessed the program after an agreement signed between the authorities of the Ministry of Education, allowing schools to be part of the IB world without paying the IBO fees.

In the case of CABA state-run schools, the Ministry assumes the costs—of institutions and students—which opens up discussions about the use of educational resources and the equity in their distribution. This jurisdiction is not casual, as it has been governed by more than fifteen years ago by the *PRO-Cambiamos* alliance, with an educational look more prone to cosmopolitanism and the market than the rest of the jurisdictions. The fact that only ten schools have decided to participate in the program shows the dissent that institutional projects often assume to the black swan mentioned. We point out these processes as specific to the Argentine educational reality that differs from the ways in which the IB has been implemented in other countries of the region, with promotion and growth from the state sector, as is the case of Peru, Ecuador and public-private joints in Costa Rica (Beech et al., 2019). Regarding the implementation of the DP of the IB, we note that this is an optional program for students. In some institutions, depending on their management, this implies the creation of parallel courses for students who enroll. In others, all students have the same curriculum, and some take exams and other Program requirements. Most educational institutions try to universalize them through various strategies, but for cost, lack of motivation, among others, often such strategies are difficult.

2. Methodology

This article is part of a broader research that analyzes the reasons why certain educational institutions decide to be part of the DP and the differences in its application. Based on these general objectives, we have created the specific ones that are related to the type of students enrolled in IB schools; the contribution to the educa-

tional inequality and fragmentation that these institutions generate; the ways in which speeches and global education agencies in Argentina are present; and their influence on local educational policy. For this purpose, authorities — coordinators of the IB and CAS area — and teachers from several IB schools, both state and private subsystems, were interviewed.

For the proposed analysis we will use the ongoing field work that initiated in 2017, in which in-depth² interviews were conducted with educational agents from schools in both areas of integrated management to the IB through the implementation of the DP. The interviews are complemented by classroom observations, archival work in institutions, and analysis of programs and web pages from ten selected institutions located at AMBA.

We understand that schools are not speech reproduction organizations, but agents and agencies with meaning and objectives. In this sense, we take the notion of micropolitics (Ball, 2002), to refer to spaces of power struggle, where the actors fight for control, and where different objectives and interests that are ideologically and valuably oriented are crystallized, and the concrete and unique way in which these micropolicies create macropolicies. Agents and institutions are not reduced to simple players of programs — as packages — but they, consciously or not, intervene in their delimitation and construction: there is negotiation, chance and ad hoc actions in schools. If we maintain that policies and programs in general —educative in particular— are mediated by speeches and international agencies (Beech, 2009) and, despite the state centrality, there are other organizations with or without profit that are involved in the delimitation of educational policies and programs, both in their development and in their implementation, we can affirm following Ball et al. (2012) that Educational policies and programs are constantly reinterpreted and transformed by the different actors involved in the process, in diverse contexts as regards their materiality, history and power



relations, where the creativity of schools and their actors play an essential role in interpreting and implementing these policies and programs (Beech et al., 2019).

We affirm that education involves a work based on the other, and that a specific student profile is created from the institutional projects, margins of freedom and negotiation mentioned, since the teachers with their expectations, methods, ways of managing the class, concepts of learning, order, work and cooperation, give rise to the exercise of this profile in the dynamics of each school (Ball et al., 2012).

3. Results

3.1 Private Schools: Helping the “Other” and Developing Personal Capabilities

As we mentioned, the IB has certain features in its insertion in Argentina, through its main implementation in private schools for elite audiences. A former IB teacher and coordinator, who currently serves as a consultant to the organization, talks about the experience:

The program helps (students) to relate with the community through CAS, for me it is one of the main components by how it takes the students out from their context, as it links them to something else, as it makes them see another reality that normally they do not see. It is a benefit for both the state school and the private school, because the two (types of) schools are coming out of their reality and they relate with another school or with the community by needing the other.

This perception is mentioned in almost all of the teachers and managers involved. Several fragments stand out the importance of opening up students’ horizons in elite schools. The interviews that refer to it are focused in the “s” of the CAS component and in the ways in which, from various pedagogical and solidary

oriented actions, privileges considered universal by students can be denatured (Mayer, 2020). It is due, both to their privileged position and to their professional projection, that authorities and teachers see positively the development of these projects and competences related to CAS, as well as the inculcation of ethical commitment that is expected to last beyond the educational trajectory. The CAS component articulates SL activities by integrating the development of pedagogical projects and practices in which students apply their learning in specific community problems. The objective of the SL is oriented toward the articulation of pedagogical projects implemented in the DP related to the linking of students in the community.

As for the dimension of *helping the other*, we note that many schools had developed experiences before joining the IB and, on the basis of their membership, these have intensified and formalized. According to a SL coordinator:

I feel that we had already had the tradition of the abroad trip that was transformed when we saw the activities we needed to do in CAS. Service, CAS’ S, is what you will articulate, and we also had to add other elements to the trip as it was a two-year program. The solidarity plan grew enormously. Before the change the students prepared the trip, now besides preparing the trip and earning the right to travel, the students have to course modules: one is called institutions where once a week they have to go to an institution in the area and offer their help, give school support, go to Juanito’s home, and this change we have done is very valuable. I remember that I told the principal, ‘[the trip to] abroad is beautiful, but here it seems that they live in the core of the neighborhood, they take the bus, they do a thousand kilometers to visit poverty’.

A coordinator from another institution who had a previous program says:

What happens is that CAS is bigger: it is usually interpreted as a service to the community



and it is more than that, it seeks to develop creativity, action, the use of the body and the vocation of service. The school worked on community service and what CAS did was to set a framework. It is now in a cycle of greater importance within the framework of service learning, and the school is very interested that there is learning in service thanks to projects promoted by the teachers. The latter caused a linking with the community with people from the neighborhood dedicated to that, to know the surroundings of the campus, and the needs of the community.

There is the idea of solidary vertical learning in the SL toward constructions of horizontal solidarity (Tapia, 2017), related to pedagogies oriented to the formation of citizens. In both cases, its authorities refer to modifications in their levels of commitment to the accompanying “causes,” which seek to incorporate transversely into their daily lives, as well as in the systematization they give their projects. Following the proposal of the SL, the projects articulate curriculum content that is specific to the theoretical and school age of the students. This is relevant because it allows to improve the performance of the students involved, as well as to increase their sense of institutional belonging (Tapia, 2018). Beyond the differences in each case, we note that the conduction of SL projects is part of the institutional identity—and personal biography—of those who perform it: “The program of [the school of] frontier exists. The boys know they are involved in it and wait for the moment of the year to travel.”

As mentioned in other studies (Billig, 2013), institutionally it promotes a way to denature students’ privileges while giving an ethical commitment to having them. Solidarity trips have a central place, a cross-sectional axis of the curriculum that occupies different moments according to the school calendar. Students mobilize during the previous months with various actions related to preparing for the trip: obtain funding and resources needed for doing the improvements in the sponsored school, plan activities, and

more. Solidarity trips are typical of Argentina if compared to other experiences (Mayer, 2019). In relation to IB institutions in developed countries, these actions are concretized in international trips, which means individual and summer stays. As with all other SL projects, trips correspond to institutional projects: while in other countries students earn credits with actions they decide to carry out, which exceed the agreements and initiatives of the schools (Billig, 2013; Billig & Good, 2013). In Argentina, these are initiatives within the country that are institutionally channeled. This difference is central, as it involves the educational community—teachers, authorities, parents, and students—in intentionally chosen projects with institutional and pedagogical objectives set by the school, and not just as a civic duty that is said institutionally. This makes a national difference, observed in all schools versus other latitudes: solidarity is conceived as an institutional aspect and not as individual actions, although it aspires to encourage practices that will last and can be replicated outside the school environment. An important aspect is that solidarity trip is not part of educational trip, as it is carried out in the framework of strengthening institutional linkages with internationalization and student mobility processes in the framework of the DP program.

It is relevant to mention the global and local concepts as an approach that guides the objectives of IB programs, and how such principles are resigned in the implementation of SL in the institutions addressed. In this sense, the concept of globalization is widespread as processes that form citizenship from the educational sphere that overflow the national identity as an institution in the formation of individual and collective senses. The sense of the global in IB schools implies the recognition of diversity, new forms of coexistence, values such as tolerance and vocation as means of building a subject belonging to a local community, in relation to the regional and the international.

The global component of IB programs constitutes a core of representations in which



education is reconfigured in the framework of globalization as a trend that hegemonizes institutional difficulties. Such representations around the potential of educational internationalization seek to transform realities by promoting skills and competences that shape global citizen practices based on solidarity, respect for differences, coexistence as a way of living or reflexivity as a possibility of resolving conflicts.

In contrast to the institutions that have history in the development of solidarity projects, we find others that do not:

Researcher: Was there any program before CAS?

Coordinator: No, not really. It is still something that costs a lot

R: But, for example, while I was waiting, I saw something from an environmental program. Isn't it considered as CAS?

C: No, not that.

R: Why?

C: That was or is an initiative of a biology professor who decided to conduct activities related to the coast of Rio [de la Plata] that is near the school. But it is something specific and part of the subject.

For this reason, we note that not all institutions have solidarity-based approaches prior to their inclusion in the DP. This lack of history in this area is a difficulty in delineating actions today, along with other mismatches in the implementation at the general level of the IB. The latter is highlighted because SL is delimited here, rather than being conceived as a constitutive element of the school — something that the previous institutions have done— even with the different stages and dissimilar commitments of the institutional evolution.

3.2. SL in state schools: deficiencies as strengths

We discussed ways in which school learning is based in private schools for elite audiences.

However, this transnational network includes institutions of the state management subsystem to a lesser extent for the Argentine case. Various research (Braslavsky, 1985; Gamallo, 2015; Mayer, 2012; Narodowsky & Andrada, 2001) show how the middle and middle-high sectors migrated from state schools to the private sector, a movement that deepened in recent decades. In relation to the endowed public, although they remain in some specific state schools, their enrollment is mostly concentrated in private schools. However, the percentages of private sector enrollment show that the transition to this subsystem is not exclusive to the elites, since the percentage reaches 30% of the national enrollment (Feldfeber et al., 2018), but in urban centers, such as the City of Buenos Aires, it reaches 50% (Larrondo & Mayer, 2018). Studies such as Gamallo's (2015) indicate that, to a lesser extent, the most disadvantaged sectors of society were part of this migration to the private education sector. This makes a difference with the schools analyzed that are attended by privileged audiences with those that host state schools, as these institutions cannot assume the role of denaturing the privileges of small portions of society. Thus, for an interviewed rector, the SL process is complicated:

Here it is very difficult, they do some things, some raffles, but the reality is that students are closer to being the recipients of those actions than to being the ones who generate them.

In the face of this same situation and socio-economic profiles, authorities in another state school adapted the CAS component, as the situations are:

Before that, I worked in two private schools that had the IB and coordinated the area of learning-service. It was easier there in every way: The IB was more settled, it was better known. It is not the same in this school: Very few students take it. While everyone is involved in the workshop, the commitment and demand are not the same. The other thing that simplified it was that it was



easy to identify a third party to work with. Here you cannot do that.

And continues:

Here we have students in very complex situations. You cannot ask them for economic support. What we did was to combine the specific knowledge of the students, as students of a technical school, with community work. We then developed a tool to measure the PH of Palermo's Lake and nearby streams. Since we are a state school, it is easy to get donations of the necessary equipment, something we would not get as a private school. It is a project to improve the quality of life of the community.

Unlike the experiences of the private sector, there is a specific classroom space to develop the project, which corresponds to the *Workshop* subject. There, the CAS area coordinator works by contributing with his/her knowledge of the SL, and teachers of the specific area develop the project; these teachers graduated in this institution, so these projects are mediated by their institutional affiliation, paying for the sense of belonging and educational community. While the teachers in charge contribute to the specific knowledge, the CAS manager contributes to the knowledge of the area and the managements with companies and donations, which have an impact on the links and working trajectory of the students.

4. Discussion

In previous paragraphs we have reported the projects of schools within the CAS area of the IB. This does not mean that there are no SL experiences beyond the DP, but that these schools incorporate them from it. In relation to private schools, we identify two issues on a regular basis: first, the development of projects referring to another person to help, and the existence of previous experiences. Following the definition of SL, we affirm that such actions are framed in the idea of the realization of community services, where

although there was intentional solidarity there was no connection with the pedagogical contents, i.e., they have no basis in the curriculum, as mentioned by the authorities interviewed. In turn, the logic of community service implies less commitment from students—and from the institution—and less impact from actions, since they are not pedagogically oriented, nor structured over time (Spring et al., 2008).

Integration into the SL curriculum involves higher levels of institutional commitment, as it involves the deployment of strategies and resources—human, material, and symbolic—to carry out the project. This institutional commitment is key for narratives and repertoires to install their development, preventing their implementation from leading to voluntary positions of teachers.

Around the inclusion of SL in these schools through the IB, a limitation arises. As we indicated at the beginning, because it is not compulsory, students decide to join the DP optionally. This can lead to different levels of commitment, since it is mandatory for some to take it, and for others it is not, according to institutional requirements. Here the institutions have the possibility to incorporate it beyond the IB.

In relation to both areas of management, what emerges from the interviews is a partnership between SL and community service, where the main idea is helping another person who is vulnerable in socio-economic aspects. For this reason, as mentioned in the case of a private school, community actions were hidden for the environment or, in other words, previous knowledge of the authorities of that institution prevented such activities from being considered as SL experiences, despite the existence of manuals and literature in the area that encourage these projects.

We also note, in state schools, experiences are limited by the socio-economic of the students, without exploring other options. Similarly, it seems that the conduction of the activities analyzed corresponds to a *logic of dis-carding*: according to the institutional authori-



ties, if traditional solidarity activities cannot be conducted, others are explored.

In both areas of management, a responsible and active citizenship ethic prevails, where students-citizens must commit to their environment. For private schools, such a commitment is socially privileged, while in the state experience that manages to motorize projects, part of the collective finds a social usefulness to the knowledge. In this regard, we observe narratives that stress inequalities in institutions implementing IB programs. With regard to SL pedagogical practices, we note that they continue to reinforce local, national or international identities. Although this concept of globalization is not restricted to the educational field in which these programs are placed, it legitimizes fragmentary assessments of internationalization as a range of opportunities offered by the IB world, linked with cosmopolitanism as ideal.

The construction of global citizenship encompasses complexities of identities, as they refer to multiculturalism and diversities as ethical values of the global world. The relationships between the global and the local, though fragmented, reinforce representations of justice, peace, tolerance and coexistence by making service, commitment and individual reflexivity tools for the development of skills and competences of global citizenship. These components support the logic of CAS and SL as a pedagogical project, enabling students to generate solidarity in community settings. In both cases, the recognition of young people as protagonists and responsible is a unifying factor in these practices.

Considerations around two postures — and the possible nuances — are proposed: on the one hand, they *empower* students to recognize violated rights and the fact that they are the ones who must look for solutions, often making claims to the state at any level. On the other hand, these non-institutional participation formats can weaken state actions, which are carried out by other means and in partnership with intermediate sectors — NGOs — contributing

to major debilitations of state institutions. In turn, they mark inequalities between schools that can mobilize resources and those that fail to do so. This tends to deploy depoliticized forms of collective action where politics is restricted and other actors and logics are involved. Thus, we notice the inequalities in the implementation of IB programs in the various areas of management, tensions that reinforce the resistance of the institutionality of the educational system to the adaptation to globalizing logic of the pedagogical programs, especially in the state schools, since they imply inward elite processes that leads these schools to implement flexibility of the IB program components, which does not occur in the private schools studied.

5. Conclusions

In the article we discuss the ways in which SL projects are implemented in private and state schools that adhere to the DP of the IB. The implementations of SL in these schools are framed in the existing national educational regulations that emphasize solidarity education as a pedagogical device for its linkage with local problems, strengthening processes of citizen formation.

In the case of private schools carrying out the projects — with a background in their institutional history with regard to community projects — they can be understood within a logic that aims to train individuals awareness of their privileges to *open them to the world* and to get them out of their *comfort zone*. With these practices a logic of *good citizens* emerges, committed to the society as a return for their social position. These narratives seem to be in line with others that promote other participatory processes, in which political representatives cannot act or mobilize for various reasons. These *aids* are specific and individualized, even if they are part of a collective: an institution, organization or target group that can be attended is determined, without pretense of altering the *status quo*.



Although it is positive, one disadvantage shown by the authorities is that of presenting depoliticized repertoires: Solidarity projects imply experiences to support others, offered in relation to shortcomings and whose beneficiaries are not usually problematized as subjects violated in essential rights, leading to the strengthening of the original positions (Cookson et al., 2010; Tiramonti & Ziegler, 2008): according to the segments analyzed, solidarities are conceived as practices that expand student universes, without seeking integral transformations. Actions are being proposed to alleviate disadvantaged positions, such as collaborating with rural schools, without changing essential situations. There is a question about the role of schools in seeking structural solutions.

We observe in these schools that there were voluntaries and the development of private solidarity that tries to help with altruistic narratives (Mayer, 2013). We point out projects related to practices derived from Corporate Social Responsibility; voluntary and community processes. These processes are linked to narratives that authorities define as appropriate for their schools, which are more focused on the benefits students can gain than on their impacts on communities. Also, as we mentioned, institutional projects that could be incorporated into the SL are not observed by the authorities.

In the case of the state schools analyzed, there are two components to emphasize: On the one hand, the authorities that understand SL as a key support element when considering that students are the ones who might need the support do not find any motivation in carrying out projects in this area. This absence implies follow-up difficulties by IB authorities, which certify the functioning of the CAS. On the other hand, in the second state school studied, the apparent difficulty—the socioeconomic category of the population—was presented as a challenge to think about alternatives to projects conceived in a comprehensive way: as part of a community that understands the need for sustainable devel-

opment and develops a more horizontal logic, where SL narratives amplify, compared to narrow looks of the private schools studied. The difficulties lead the institutions to recognize problems common to society by guiding students as citizens and future professionals with an effective and technical role.

Notes

- 1 Another case mentioned by the authors (Ball & Youdell, 2008), refers to the exogenous privatization of education, corresponding to a privatization of education, generating quasi-markets and having the Chilean case as the main expression.
- 2 In all the interviewed, their repertoires were approached comprehensively, taking into account the specific contexts in which they develop. From our perspective, every social actor produces it in narrating a given situation. We agree with Saltalamacchia (1992) when pointing out that the individual is “a place of joining” a particular set of social relations” (p. 38). The interview should be understood as the framework of a theoretical elaboration in which no full agreements or similar advantages will arise, but instead interpretations that did not exist before the relationship (Saltalamacchia, 1992).

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