

INNOVATION AND TRADITION: TEACHING AT CNF/FGV AND THE "REINCARNATED" HERBARTIAN PEDAGOGY



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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the educational experience of the Nova Friburgo School (CNF) of the Getúlio Vargas Foundation, examining the relationship between the Didactic Units Method and the Herbartian Pedagogy. The research is based on works by Irene Mello Carvalho (1969, 1988) that document the history of the CNF. The critical analysis reveals that, despite being presented as innovative, the method resumes principles of Herbartian Pedagogy, such as the "steps of formal instruction". The study highlights the complex relationship between innovation and tradition in the educational context of the CNF, demonstrating the persistent influence of traditional pedagogical models.

Keywords: Nova Friburgo College. Didactic Units. Herbartian Pedagogy.

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INTRODUCTION

In order to guide the reader in the "dive into the institutional memory of the CNF" that will be carried out throughout this work, it is necessary to compose a presentation of the CNF, and thus make visible the educational experience of this educational institution, especially regarding the relations between the Method of Didactic Units and the "steps of formal instruction", a central element of the pedagogical perspective developed by Herbart.

As the primary basis of this analysis, I choose two printed sources that I consider to be of great importance in order to make it possible, at the present time, to have access to the institutional memory of the CNF. These are two books, edited by FGV, authored by Irene Mello Carvalho and which (according to the author) had as their main objective to record the educational experience of Colégio Nova Friburgo. It is clear, however, that these books will not be accepted uncritically, that is, I understand that to the same extent that these works offer a wealth of information about the CNF that could not be neglected in a study such as the one we have developed, it is still necessary to take into account the fact that these books represent (among other things) the strategic position (Cf. CERTEAU, 1994) of actors who, based on these printed materials, sought to present an official version of the history of the CNF and the memory contained in the records presented in these books. Thus, it should be clarified that I seek to employ analysis procedures that aim to minimize the influences of the intentionality of these institutional actors and, in this way, to apprehend in a less "ideological" way the meaning of the educational experience developed at Colégio Nova Friburgo.

THE "METHOD OF DIDACTIC UNITS" AND THE PEDAGOGY OF THE CNF: DISCIPLINE AND INSTRUCTION

In this work, we highlight the elements related to the pedagogical aspects of the College, which are: a) the disciplinary issues of the student organization of the CNF; b) the teaching proposal of the CNF. Thus, in this topic, aspects alluding to the application of the "Method of Didactic Units" (CARVALHO, 1969) within the scope of the CNF will be presented and discussed. This proved to be fundamentally necessary when I made contact with Irene Mello Carvalho's book alluding to this method, in which the former director of the CNF and former director of the Teaching Division of FGV indicates that this constituted the primary basis for the structuring of the teaching programs, the curricular structuring and the norms of coexistence among the students of the CNF. From this stems

the premise that, for a consistent analysis of what represented the educational experience developed at the FGV College, it is necessary to understand how this method was applied to the pedagogical and disciplinary dimensions of the CNF.

The didactic units are planned in order to promote a global view of the themes studied, as the Gestalt theory, with its concepts such as figure-ground, proximity and good form, inspires the organization of this process. Thus, the student is led to understand the connections between ideas and to see the meaning of what he is learning, and each didactic unit begins with an initial diagnosis. At this stage, the teacher seeks to know the students' previous knowledge and understand their needs. This step is essential to create a teaching plan that really dialogues with the reality of the class. From there, the objectives are outlined, but in a way that contemplates not only the learning of content, but also the emotional and social development of the students.

The activities proposed during the process are always dynamic, creative and participatory. They can include group discussions, experimental practices, and individual reflections, always encouraging the student to engage and think critically. The focus is not only on the final result, but on the path taken, which is why the evaluation in this method is continuous. The goal is to allow both the teacher and the student to reflect on progress and make adjustments when necessary.

THE DISCIPLINE IN ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PEDAGOGY OF THE CNF: GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY IN FOCUS

In order to make it possible to understand how the Method of Didactic Units was applied to the disciplinary dimension of the CNF, the theoretical aspects alluding to this method must be analyzed. Taking into account the assertion of Irene Mello Carvalho highlighted above, it is necessary to understand that the Method of Didactic Units finds two major pillars of theoretical support based on Philosophy and Psychology. According to CARVALHO (1969), the philosophical part of the method would be based on the steps of Herbart's formal instruction and would be linked to the more properly instructional aspects of the teaching objectives. On the other hand, the part of the method based on its "psychological pillar" would account for a perspective: "gestaltist and not atomist (CARVALHO, 1969; p. 23)". Such a psychological perspective, it seems, would have given rise to the creation of disciplinary norms based on the valorization of group life and the construction of rules of discipline and self-government, essentially if the assumptions of

Gestalt psychology are remembered, which propose an emphasis on group work, as well as on the attempt to solve the individual's internal problems in a group (BYINGTON, 1999). According to CARVALHO (1988), this psychological perspective would influence the concept of discipline that guided the activities of the CNF, which: is essentially based on real interest in the student, on understanding of his points of view and empathy in the face of his affective reactions, and on respect for his individuality (CARVALHO, 1988; p. 143).

Gestalt psychology would also, according to the aforementioned author, serve as a reference for the creation of disciplinary norms, based on the "harmonious coexistence" among peers of students, and between students, teachers and employees, and for the structuring of discipline rules based on group problem solving, as well as on the premise that group unity would be one of the main objectives to be achieved by the disciplinary norms present in the pedagogical proposal of the CNF (Cf. CARVALHO, 1969).

The method of didactic units, when applied from the perspective of Gestalt education, is an approach that places the student at the center of the learning process. As we can see, it is based on fundamental Gestalt principles, such as the perception of the whole before the parts and the connection between the elements, to create more complete and meaningful educational experiences. The idea is simple: to teach in such a way that the student not only memorizes, but understands, feels, and relates the knowledge to his or her own life. This means that the content is not isolated, but presented within a larger context, which makes sense and arouses interest. The student, in this method, is not a passive receiver, but an active participant in the construction of his learning.

Notwithstanding these imperatives of self-government and harmonious group coexistence, it is necessary to question what would be the limits of the "flexible" character of these disciplinary norms, because, even though there are mentions of the flexible character of the disciplinary norms of the CNF in the books analyzed, even so: "The professors themselves guided the conduct of the students from the time they woke up until the moment they went to sleep (CARVALHO, 1988; p. 143)". In this way, it is possible to grasp a contradiction between the imperatives of self-government proposed in the pedagogy of the CNF and the "orientation of conduct" carried out full-time by the CNF teachers themselves.

The analysis of these sources serves as an indication that, no matter how great the efforts made to give history a single meaning, even so, there are always elements that demonstrate that there is no possibility of postulating the existence of a "single narrative"

with regard to any historical event (BRAUDEL, 1999), despite the efforts made by the builders of the memory of the aforementioned historical event to represent the "true version of the facts". Thus, as seen, the CNF would have actually developed disciplinary and pedagogical strategies in the sense of seeking to promote the group cohesion of its students and the integration of its teachers around common projects. Such initiatives strongly focused on the development of extracurricular projects, whose organization and administration would be open to the students, but these would be supervised by CNF professors in the development of these activities. According to CARVALHO, such activities were called: "(...) extra-class or extracurricular activities. In a boarding school, these activities are very important to provide a wide range of educational experiences and constructively fill leisure hours. Today, the denomination of co-curricular activities is preferred, because they can be carried out in the classroom or outside it, and are almost always articulated in one way or another with the school curriculum (CARVALHO, 1988; p. 121)". As an example of these, the following can be mentioned: the CNF Band, the students' musical ensemble (Banda Papoula), the Chess Club, the Literary Club and the Theater Club (CARVALHO, 1988). What should be emphasized, however, is that this process would not have occurred in a totally consensual manner and that, like any project, institutional or not, it ends up constituting a field of conflicts and attempts to impose particular interests that are intended to be hegemonic (Cf. CERTEAU, 1994), which motivates us to infer that such rules could also have been questioned, and transgressions on the part of its students and/or teachers, since none of the documents analyzed mentions problems of this order, which leads to the hypothesis that these would have been suppressed from the institution's memory records, thus making it difficult to undertake the composition of a history of the disciplinary transgressions carried out by the CNF students, which, even though it is not the object of the present study, could be interesting in the sense of making it possible to "make the materiality of this school institution speak" in another way (Cf. LE GOFF, 1985).

THE CNF AND TEACHING BY DIDACTIC UNITS: RESUMING THE STEPS OF HERBART'S FORMAL INSTRUCTION

As mentioned earlier, the pedagogy developed at the CNF used as a "cornerstone" the "Method of Didactic Units", created and developed within the scope of this College. It was also highlighted the fact that this method had a double support, based on philosophy

and psychology. If in relation to the disciplinary aspects of the pedagogy of the CNF, its basis was Gestalt psychology, in relation to the elements of teaching developed at the CNF, its theoretical framework goes back to the notion of units, disseminated by Henri Morrison in 1926, and whose theoretical affiliation to the steps of Herbart's formal instruction is quite close. Before deepening the way in which this theory came to structure the teaching programs and the curricular organization of the CNF, it is necessary to bring to light its main postulates, as well as to explain in which aspects this theory approaches the steps of Herbart's formal instruction.

In order to understand the "Method of Didactic Units" developed and applied at the CNF, it is necessary to understand the fundamental characteristics of the notion of units, coined by Henri Morrison in 1926, according to which: "a complex and significant aspect of the environment, of an organized science, of an art or of conduct, which, once learned, results in an adaptation of the personality (MORRISON, apud CARVALHO, 1969; p. 22)".

This "complex and significant aspect" should be:

broad enough to be important and to have sufficient homogeneity to constitute an organic whole (...) it would also have a classification based on a primordial distinction between three types of units: a) unit-matter: a topic, a generalization; b) unit-experience: a center of interest, a purpose, a need of the student; c) mixed-unit (didactic unit): an activity of normative and critical discovery and verification (Morrison, apud CARVALHO, 1969; p. 24).

According to this author, the didactic unit would be the matrix of the pedagogical organization, especially with regard to the teaching programs and the curricular structuring of the CNF. In this regard, the author indicates that: "(...) With regard to the articulation between the didactic units, carried out with the objective of composing a curriculum and/or a course plan of a discipline, it is interesting to observe the way in which the "didactic unit" comes to be configured as a regulatory element of the teaching-learning relations, since the objectives of teaching with regard to its behavioral dimension are based on this notion, and follow a plan composed of the following stages: "exploration, presentation, assimilation, organization, recitation (Morrison, apud CARVALHO, 1969; p. 67)". Before proceeding with the examination of each of these stages, it is worth identifying how this pedagogical proposal is close to Herbart's theory of the steps of formal instruction. To this end, I present a comparative table between these two theoretical strands (see annex).

When examining the picture mentioned above, regarding teaching by didactic units, it is possible to perceive that the phases of the Morrison Plan were arranged in a manner

analogous to the steps of Herbart's formal instruction³ (Cf. SUCHODWLSKKY, 1973). Before moving on to the analysis of how the Morrison Plan was appropriated and used in the CNF, it is worth detailing what each of its phases consists of. For the author, the phases of the Morrison Plan correspond to the following didactic activities: *a) Exploration*: stage in which the teacher must gather the elements related to the theme he will address, with a view to the elaboration of teaching activities; *b) Presentation*: succinct exposition of the content by the teacher; *c) Assimilation*: proposition of fixation exercises, with a view to making the student assimilate the fundamental points of each didactic unit; *d) Organization*: at this stage, the student must carry out activities alluding to the theme without the help of the teacher; *e) Recitation*: in the final stage, the student must make an oral presentation about the subject worked, and then the final evaluation of learning is responsible for evaluating the student's performance in this activity. From these stages, concerning the Morrison Plan, the CNF would have developed its own teaching method, the Teaching by Didactic Units method. In the second table that follows in the annex, the steps of the Morrison Plan and the CNF Plan are presented.

Regarding the differences between the Morrison Plan and the CNF Plan, it should be mentioned that, despite the great influence of Henri Morrison's ideas on the composition of the CNF Plan, even so, the teaching planning at the *College* had some more stages (those of supplementation and verification), which proposed teaching activities related to them. Thus, in the "supplementation" stage, for example, activities would be planned in which the student could, with the help of the teacher, repeat the stages of "general presentation" and "study/assimilation of the subunits", so that, from then on, he could again undergo the "verification" stage (carried out with the monitoring of the teacher at the time of the elaboration of the exercise by the student(s)) and, finally (if the student(s) had learned, move on to the final stage, that of "expression", (relating to the verification of learning through written exercises). The CNF Plan would therefore be the experimental dimension of the didactics developed in this College.

³ The steps of Herbart's formal instruction are as follows: a) First step - *clarity stage*: in this stage the student must simply observe the object and/or element of teaching that he must learn. b) Second step - *association or comparison stage*: in this stage the student should be led to compare (or associate) the impressions he had of the observation activity carried out with his own opinions and/or other similar teaching themes; c) Third step - *systematization or generalization stage*: from the first comparison made, the student should apply the inference scheme developed in the second step to several related elements, thus performing a generalization exercise. d) Fourth Step - *method or application stage*: in this stage, the student should develop associative schemes that allow him not only to generalize the results obtained in the third step, but also to expose such results in an organized and intelligible way to the others in his class and to the teacher (Cf. CAMBI, 2001).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As observed throughout this work, the CNF Board presented the Method of Didactic Units as the flagship of its pedagogy. Such a teaching method would be based on an experimental and innovative perspective, according to the understanding of Prof. Irene Mello Carvalho, but in the course of this brief study it was possible to realize that such a method ended up resuming (and in a very substantial way) the steps of Herbart's formal instruction. In this regard, it is interesting to see what Anísio Teixeira comments in the preface to the book *Teaching by Didactic Units*, authored by the then director of the CNF, Irene Mello Carvalho:

At the height of 1954, it is still provocative to follow Morrison's tortures to present his conservative thought as scientific. I understand it as the result of the real limitation of our pedagogical knowledge, especially with regard to teaching techniques and processes, and it seems to me inappropriate to want to consider it as something better than the old Herbart, who had the advantage of having indoctrinated in a much earlier period, when we knew much less about psychology, of philosophy, anthropology, sociology and the human sciences that underpin education (...). In any case, however, in a country where little has been known about Herbart and where teaching has not yet gone beyond the situation of memorizing disconnected fragments of knowledge for examination, experimenting with the resources recommended by Morrison to teach the subjects of the secondary course with an emphasis on unity, organization of knowledge and integration, is such a novelty that it is hard for me to believe how Dona Irene Mello Carvalho could carry it out in a rigid secondary school, uniform and legalistic as the Brazilian one (CARVALHO, 1988, p. 116-117).

Apparently, Anísio Teixeira saw Morrison's method as excessively technical and based on efficiency, treating education almost as an exact science. This focus, for him, disregarded the complexity of human learning, which involves not only cognitive aspects, but also emotional, social, and cultural aspects. The Brazilian intellectual's comment masterfully illustrates the notion that Teaching by Didactic Units, contained in the Morrison Plan and the CNF Plan, consisted much more in a resumption of Herbart's Pedagogy and the steps of formal instruction, than in an experimental and innovative experience, as proclaimed by Prof. Irene Mello Carvalho when she was in charge of the CNF Board. It should also be noted that, despite the fact that in the middle of the twentieth century, there was a resumption of Herbart's Pedagogy within the scope of the CNF, I do not intend to indicate that such an educational experience would be invalid, but rather with a different pedagogical orientation (traditional, and not innovative) from that attributed to it by the CNF Board.

Morrison and Herbart's approaches reflect the desire to systematize teaching, disregarding human complexity and the multiple dimensions of learning, which seems to have been repeated in the case studied here. These limitations remind us that education is more than a technical process: it is a living relationship, which needs to be flexible, sensitive and centered on the integral development of the student. It seems clear to us that, contrary to the initial proposal, the opposite ended up occurring in practice, since the method of didactic units is a way of rescuing the true meaning of teaching and learning, innovating and proposing new conditions for the students' cognitive aspects.

Which reminds us that education is not just about transmitting information, but about building meanings, in addition to helping each student to see the world in a broader, more connected and more human way.

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ATTACHMENTS

Comparative table "a": Steps of Herbart's formal Instruction / Morrison Plan

Steps of Formal Instruction (Herbart)	Morrison Plan
1 – Clarity 2 – Association 3 – Systematization 4 - Method	1 – Exploration 2 – Presentation 3 – Assimilation 4 – Organization 5 – Recitation (oral presentation by the student)

Comparative Table "b": Morrison Plan / Teaching by Didactic Units (CNF Plan)

Steps of the Morrison Plan	Stages of the CNF Plan
1 – Exploration 2 – Presentation 3 – Assimilation 4 – Organization 5 – Recitation (oral presentation made by the student)	1 – Polling 2 – General Presentation 3 – Study or Assimilation of subunits 4 – Organization 5 – Verification 6 – Supplementation 7 -Expression (could be carried out by written or oral activities)