

## DIALOGICAL PROCESSES IN ADULT EDUCATION: THE PERSPECTIVE OF CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

Vanessa Rosa Bastos da Silva<sup>1</sup>; Maria Cláudia Santos Lopes de Oliveira<sup>1</sup>; Angela Maria Cristina Uchoa de Abreu Branco<sup>1</sup>; Eileen Pfeiffer Flores<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

What interactions arise when adopting a dialogical stance in educational practices with young people and adults? This is a question that we try to discuss in this article, which brings Cultural Psychology as a framework capable of offering resources for reflection about the meanings inherent in human activities of knowledge construction. The analysis highlighted here reports the experience developed through the University Extension Project of the Psychology Department of the University of Brasília entitled “Livros Abertos – Aqui Todos Contam” during the realization of two Dialogic Reading meetings in a public school for the education of young people and adults in Brasília. Experience shows us how the possibility of considering and interpreting the values and beliefs of the people involved in a certain activity can be part of the dialogic teaching and learning processes of all those involved.

**Keywords:** Dialogical processes; cultural psychology; youth and adult education

### Procesos dialógicos en la EJA: reflejando a partir de la Psicología Cultural

#### RESUMEN

¿Cuáles interacciones surgen al adoptarse una postura dialógica en las prácticas educacionales con jóvenes y adultos? Esta es una cuestión que intentamos discutir en el presente artículo que trae la Psicología Cultural como estructura capaz de ofrecer recursos para reflexión sobre los significados inherentes a las actividades humanas de construcción del conocimiento. El análisis aquí destacado muestra la experiencia desarrollada por intermedio del Proyecto de Extensión Universitaria del Departamento de Psicología de la Universidad de Brasília intitulado “Livros Abertos – Aqui Todos Contam” durante la realización de dos encuentros de Lectura Dialógica en una escuela pública específica para educación de jóvenes y adultos en Brasília, Distrito Federal. La experiencia nos apunta como la posibilidad de consideración e interpretación de los valores y creencias de las personas abarcadas en una determinada actividad puede componer con los procesos dialógicos de enseñanza y aprendizaje de todos los involucrados.

**Palabras clave:** Procesos dialógicos; psicología cultural; educación de jóvenes y adultos

### Processos dialógicos na EJA: refletindo a partir da Psicologia Cultural

#### RESUMO

Quais interações surgem ao se adotar uma postura dialógica nas práticas educacionais com jovens e adultos? Esta é uma questão que tentamos discutir no presente artigo que traz a Psicologia Cultural como arcabouço capaz de oferecer recursos para reflexão sobre os significados inerentes às atividades humanas de construção do conhecimento. A análise aqui destacada relata a experiência desenvolvida através do Projeto de Extensão Universitária do Departamento de Psicologia da Universidade de Brasília intitulado “Livros Abertos – Aqui Todos Contam” durante a realização de dois encontros de Leitura Dialógica em uma escola pública específica para educação de jovens e adultos em Brasília, Distrito Federal. A experiência nos mostra como a possibilidade de consideração e interpretação dos valores e crenças das pessoas envolvidas em uma determinada atividade pode compor com os processos dialógicos de ensino e aprendizagem de todos os envolvidos.

**Palavras-chave:** Processos dialógicos; psicologia cultural; Educação de Jovens e Adultos

<sup>1</sup> Universidade de Brasília – Brasília – DF – Brasil; vrosabastos@gmail.com; mcsloliveira@gmail.com; branco.angela@gmail.com; eileen@unb.br

## INTRODUCTION

The school, in contemporary times, presents complexities that make it necessary to reflect about its function and the quality of teaching it guarantees to students. According to Gentili (1995), school exclusion is not only due to lack of access to institutional enrollment, but also to a low-quality teaching process, which hinders the student's permanence in the educational environment. Dubet (2003), when discussing the social function of the school, points to the fact that exclusion tends to be one of the dimensions of the school experience of all students, if we consider the homogenized and massified project of education, whenever the plurality, inherent to the condition of individuals in development, is disregarded.

In this scenario, ideally, Youth and Adult Education, commonly called EJA in Brazil, is presented as a field marked by major challenges in Basic Education, part of a set of efforts by society to overcome social and educational inequality, the training of workers and the practice of citizenship (Freire, 2011). Such challenges are faced in the daily lives of students, by claiming their right to a highly-qualified education and by education professionals who are committed to building meaningful and sensitive learning possibilities in their educational practice.

Furtado (2015) points out, based on an analysis of the research carried out on the subject, that EJA policies have devoted greater attention to certification as an answer to the need for training the workforce for the job market, which is increasingly complex and demanding, than for the commitment to the formation of conscientious and critical citizen. According to Haddad and Di Pierro (2000) this emphasis on the professional training character derives of the reform of the Brazilian state, a moment seen as a kind of neoliberal shift in public policies in general.

The neoliberal context has had even more pronounced effects on EJA than on other educational levels (cf. Costa & Machado, 2018). This is largely due to the emphasis given, in Brazil, and from the 1990s onwards, under the direct influence of the World Bank, to the expansion of elementary education and keeping students in the flow at the expected age (DiPierro, 2000). As a result, EJA was left in the background in the distribution of the already scarce public funding, having been considered a form of subordinate education (Moura, 2017), but its total abandonment, at the time, was coated with a "technical" justification by part the World Bank and the governments that followed its primer. The perspective of "turning off the tap of adult literacy" with the exclusive concentration of resources on regular education becomes prevalent.

According to Leite and Campos (2019), the predominant profile of EJA students, in the Brazilian

public network, is not made up of illiterate people, but of male workers, who have already had unsuccessful previous school experiences and who seek at EJA an opportunity for personal development and professional advancement.

The scenario outlined above is not exclusive to Brazil or to so-called emerging countries. In the United Kingdom, Ade-Ojo and Ducksworth (2017) analyze the transformations in Adult Literacy in terms of perceptions, practices and policies. The authors set the focus on the crucial point of the existence and encouragement of democratic learning spaces proposed by Paulo Freire, that is, learning spaces where everyone can participate equally and where power structures embedded in forms of knowledge are recognized. They conclude that, from the 1970s on, there has been a growing depletion of the meaning of these spaces, as an effect of the cultural dissonance between the ethos inspired by Freire, guided by the concept of Social Capital, and the contemporary hegemonic ethos, based on the concept of Human Capital. While the concept of Social Capital is associated with the ethos of proximity, community connections and support networks, Human Capital is associated with quantifiable productivity, education costs, income and market.

Ade-Ojo and Ducksworth (2017) show how the growing dominance of Human Capital has affected adult literacy in the UK, leading to the progressive disappearance of democratic learning spaces. Note that there is a very similar movement in Brazil, where the implementation of the Human Capital ethos is accompanied by the defamation of ideas associated with the Social Capital ethos (see the constant vilification of the figure of Paulo Freire, intensified in the ultra-liberal-authoritarian turn post-2016). The analysis by Ade-Ojo and Ducksworth helps us understand why, in this research, the dialogic circles and the themes dealt with in them produced such intense conflicts by forging a democratic space, based on autonomy and on the dialogic construction of meanings, contrary to the attacks to the ethos of Social Capital.

Based on the notion of education as a historically and culturally constituted practice and the understanding that the individual and society are built interdependently, Cultural Psychology offers tools for thinking about the teaching and learning processes beyond the training of reading and writing skills, as well as Cultural Psychology provides theoretical resources for the reflection about the meanings inherent in the exclusively human activity of knowledge construction. Thus, this article aims to reflect, from the framework of Cultural Psychology, on an extension project at the University of Brasília, which created possibilities for interactions between reading mediators, and EJA teachers and students at a school from the Federal District, Brazil.

We also intend to discuss the role of reading mediation practices and, more specifically, of dialogic reading in human development. With this in mind, we will consider the way in which social practices operate in connection with values and beliefs and how these are given new meaning, transforming the context by also converting into personal values (Branco & Valsiner, 2012).

### **YOUTH AND ADULT EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND ISSUES**

EJA is a right guaranteed by the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDBEN)<sup>1</sup> offered free of charge to people who did not have access to literacy or continued school attendance at the ages associated with formal regular cycles of education. According to LDBEN (1996), public authorities should encourage access and permanence of illiterate young people and adults in school, if necessary, through specific programs such as EJA. In 2000, the opinion nº 1, of the National Education Council (CNE/CEB 11/2000), established the National Curriculum Guidelines for Youth and Adult Education, defining the functions, objectives and legal bases for the functioning of EJA.

There are explicit assumptions in the conception of EJA present in the legislation that should be problematized here. The first is the idea of a right time for literacy or any human development process; secondly, the naturalization of the idea that subjects with different ages and/or different schooling experiences cannot learn together. These views are objects of criticism in the field of psychology and education. In this last field, the work of Paulo Freire (1996) stands out, who argues that there is no right or wrong age to learn; learning is a constant and inexhaustible process, in irreversible time. As a result, EJA students are not out of time learners, but continuing uninterrupted cycles of learning started from birth (some even before). New knowledge inevitably transforms and gives a new meaning to existing knowledge, inseparably from socio-historical and cultural reality. This is also the case, obviously, with educators, who learn while they teach, as our learning capacity is equally constant and infinite (Freire, 1996).

A second idea that needs questioning, with the support of contemporary trends in developmental psychology is the idea of 'critical period of development'. Inherited from evolutionary psychology and biology, this idea is fruitful to explain specific phenomena of biological development (e.g., embryonic development), but not generalizable to most human developmental processes. The critical period hypothesis refers to the best combination between nervous system maturation and exposure to environmental stimuli, which would define the most appropriate time in the life course for

the occurrence of specific developmental processes, outside which these would be difficult or even impossible (Robson, 2014). Today, the application of this concept to learning is considered as controversial and much theoretical and empirical evidence is being accumulated to support its refutation. The most auspicious evidence is offered by psychological approaches that argue that learning does not only follow biological maturation processes, it can be an opportunity for the transformation of the nervous system itself through interaction with culture. Furthermore, with the population's longer life expectancy and longer working hours, the topic of life-course learning is of growing importance and should be the object of further research (Lopes de Oliveira & Souza, 2019, in press).

### **EJA and School Psychology**

Although education is a privileged context for investigation by psychology, EJA has not been the object of attention in psychology. When reviewing recent studies in the School Psychology interface and youth and adult education, we realized that there are few studies. We highlight here some that we believe are in line with the discussion we propose, since they consider socio-historical and dialogic aspects for the production of knowledge.

Gesser, Bolis, Cord, Oltramari and Pereira (2019) carried out a Critical School Psychology intervention in an EJA institution, which aimed to create a dialogical space that would allow teachers to reflect about the meanings of EJA. Gradually, as an effect of the intervention, the participating teachers paid more attention to learning in adult life and avoided a stereotyped stance at the students. The political nature of work in EJA, the precarious teachers' working conditions and the collective search for new forms of action were highlighted by the results of this study.

Alvarenga (2014) describes an experience with EJA students held at a school on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, which consisted of dialogues around texts and photographs, which portrayed the history of Youth and Adult Education in Brazil. The author analyzed the interrelationship among oral language, texts and images and how they mobilized young people's personal experiences and the production of meanings, given the denaturalization of the situation in which young people find themselves, inviting them to learn about the history of EJA. The dialogic situations enabled the reflection and mobilized their experiences, transforming the way they see themselves and how they see EJA itself. The author, however, emphasized more the dynamics and/or the relationship among the different modalities of language, photographs, texts, orality.

### **EJA and the Literacy Process**

Sonia Kramer (2010) points out that the concept

<sup>1</sup> Law 9.394 of December 20th, 1996.

of literacy refers to a learning process in which reading, writing and interpreting skills are developed, as well as the skills needed to use these abilities as part of a communication code with the sociocultural environment. According to Silva and Nascimento (2017), the development of motor coordination, learning the alphabet, numbers and word formation are essential acquisitions for the acquisition of reading skills, text comprehension and the use of written language. According to them, the literacy process expands the possibility of socialization, since new symbolic and cultural exchanges are provided to the subject and the context in which it operates.

Nowadays, literacy is understood as something more than the domain of reading and writing, a discussion that has been enriched with the concept of literate/savant. From this perspective, literate goes beyond literacy, it refers to a broader understanding of reading and writing by the student. Subjects are considered as literate when they show evidence of knowing how to read and write, but they are only considered savant when they interpret what they read and write, against the background of the context, that is, when they are able to use both domains accordingly to social norms and convert them into tools within school and social interaction (Soares, MB, 2000).

According to L. Soares (2005), EJA's audience is made up of young people and adults from popular classes who, when interrupting their school trajectory, often repeat collective and family stories of the subtraction of rights. For the author (Soares, L., 2005), ignoring the socioeconomic and cultural roots of this phenomenon and disregarding the collective, social and popular identity of its audience compromise the understanding of the very identity of EJA, with the risk of the modality being seen as a mere compensatory individual offer.

Considering the school as a space for complex, plural experiences of socialization and knowledge construction, it should invest in the development of subjects with such abilities as analyzing, understanding the social world and critically positioning themselves in the society. In this article, the activities analyzed were carried out within the scope of the University Extension Project called "Livros Abertos – Aqui Todos Contam", a partnership between the University of Brasília and the Education Bureau of the Federal District Government. The project carries out activities of reading mediation under the dialogical perspective in schools of the Federal District (for a detailed description of the Project, see Moraes, Caldas, & Flores, 2020).

## METHOD

### Dialogism and Dialogical Reading

The dialogical understanding of human phenomena forms the framework of this study, that considers

dialogicity as an inherent characteristic to human development in their psychological, social, historical and cultural aspects. In this way, personal and sociocultural development are (inter) dependent and in constant interaction, so that such mutual influence contributes to the cultural evolution of humanity and vice versa (Lopes de Oliveira, 2013).

Let's go back a little in the timeline, together with Marková and other authors, who reflect about the origins of the dialogic thinking and the concept of dialogism (Marková, 2006). This author cites some fundamental ideas of the neo-Kantian philosophy that supported the central notion of the dialogism in human development, that is, that notion human beings acquire self-awareness together with the awareness of the Other, through the engagement in different speech practices. Among the members of the neo-Kantian movement who contributed to the design of the so-called "dialogical principle", we find names such as: Herman Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, Eugen Rosenstock, Ferdinand Ebner and Gabriel Marcel. Although they do not coincide regards the dialogical principle, their contribution to social thought is broad and inspires reflections on diverse fields as religion, philosophy, linguistics and politics, in which the dialogic principle is a core conceptual basis (Marková, 2006).

Another prominent thinker in the dialogic scene, although this one has an anti-Kantian orientation (Bakhtin, 1993; Lopes de Oliveira, 2013), therefore different from the previous ones, is the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975). Bakhtin focused his studies in the area of literary analysis and considered that dialogicality is the expression of the relational nature of the human mind, which is the characteristic that allows us to build infinite interpretations of language and thought, our own and others'. Bakhtin's work highlights otherness as an essential element for the constitution of the subject, assuming that it is through the Other, in the history of social relations, that we constitute ourselves as an existing Being. We start life by learning the words of others and, in the process, the different nuances of the world of others become an essential part of our consciousness, as well as the cultural and social aspects. Considering this statement, death and non-existence would be directly related to the state of not being heard, not being recognized and not being remembered (Marková, 2006).

Inserting more elements into the discussion, Per Linell (2003) states that there is no single definition for the term "Dialogism", but a plurality of them, aligned with alternative theoretical and epistemological bases. Taking this diversity into account, Linell (2003) formulates his own conception of dialogism that represents an epistemological combination of

hypotheses about human action, communication and cognition, structured around the following axes: interaction between people; interdependence between discourse and context; socio-historical and cultural aspects of communication and dialogicity, that is, interactions take place on two levels through the use of language and metalanguage.

Finally, we bring the contribution of Amorim and Rossetti-Ferreira (2008) who, in addition to addressing Bakhtin's ideas to Psychology (which is not the main focus of the aforementioned works), brings them closer to the contributions of the theory of the Dialogical Self. According to Amorim and Rossetti-Ferreira (2008), the dialogical relationships are described in different ways: (a) direct: it is active and intersubjective exchange, in immediate and direct communication, involving two or more partners who build actions and interactions together; (b) indirect: refers to the dialogic processes that happen even when the person is alone, as she/he never acts as an isolated individual in the world, but in continuous dialogicity, as part of a society in which other people are, directly or indirectly, participating in the co-construction of individual action; (c) through imagination: when the partner or interlocutor is not present (for example, when reading or writing a text), but there is a dialogue consisting of questions and imagined answers from others; (d) and there is dialogism within the very notion of the dialogical self (Hermans, 2001).

Given the points presented above, dialogism is intimately connected with the ability to reflect, signify, create and communicate about social realities, in the face of real or imagined alterities. Thus, dialogism is an important principle, relevant in the field of study of human development and learning processes. Another evidence of the heuristic value of the dialogical approach for the investigation of the psychological phenomenon is its integrative perspective, that is, its ability to perform interpretations that systematically consider all dimensions involved in each phenomenon; as well as the understanding that people's contact with the surrounding reality is always semiotically mediated. The concepts of Self, Sign, Other, Time and Experience thus represent the set of elements to be observed when producing knowledge under this theoretical paradigm (Lopes de Oliveira & Guimarães, 2016).

In this plot, semiotic processes, or rather, affective-semiotic processes are an essential part, because culture penetrates subjectivity using dialogic processes. From this perspective, Cultural Psychology is the science of fields of dynamic meanings immersed in culture, that are always renewed and, in doing so, renovate the possibilities of feeling and thinking of each subject (Valsiner, 2012).

In this work human development is conceived of in

terms of continuous changes in the subject's psychic organization, that are perceived in his activity, his way of acting and positioning himself in front of others and oneself, in the irreversible time (Valsiner, 2012). As a consequence of conceiving human development this way human beings are constituted through interaction with other people and with the context, based on the continuous sense making. All are endowed with the ability to construct and attribute meanings and values which, in turn, participate in the symbolic production responsible for mediating social relations. In this sense, understanding human development under the dialogical paradigm involves considering the continuous updates and how this continuous updating of the relationships is experienced by people, with emphasis on intersubjectivity as an essential aspect in the relations with the otherness, as stated by Amorim and Rossetti-Ferreira (2008).

Taking this perspective into account, the experience that will be analyzed below is based on Dialogic Reading, following the format developed in the "Livros Abertos" Extension Project called LuDiCa (Dialogic Reading for Understanding) (cf. Moraes, Caldas, & Flores, 2020; Moraes & Flores, 2020).

This reading technique differs from the traditional one because it emphasizes the active participation of the audience involved in the dynamics of counting. Instead of the listener's silence and the focus on reaching the end of the story, the objective is to enable participants' speech, going beyond the content of the original narrative. As a consequence of this intentionality of the reader, participants are encouraged to leave the usually passive position of listener and autonomously participate in the construction of meanings in the dialogical circle. The invitation to dialogue is presented by the reading mediator based on a previous preparation, which consists of a careful reading of the text (and images, in the case of illustrated albums), with special attention to the narrative functions<sup>2</sup> (Flores, Rogoski & Nolasco, 2020; Moraes & Flores, 2020) and his own reactions while reading the text (Flores, 2014).

Besides the EJA context and the groups with

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<sup>2</sup> In the methodology of Functional Units, proposed by Flores and collaborators, both the analysis of the literary text and the narratives produced by the subjects are based on the interpretation of two dimensions: sequence of events and narrative functions. The first proposes units of chronological actions by examining the "plot" or "script" of the narrative. The second is especially important for reading mediation and consists of those dimensions that are expressed through what the text "does", which it potentially evokes in the reader. It is the narrative functions that give thickness (Ryle, 1968) to the plot's actions. The mediator/reader must pay special attention to these narrative functions and be responsive to their appearance during the dialogue. (Flores, Rogoski, & Nolasco, 2020).

younger participants, other contexts in which the dialogic and interactive reading has proved fruitful involves: language development, both vocabulary and oral expression expansion (Fontes & Cardoso-Martins, 2004), narrative comprehension (Flores, Pires, & Souza, 2014; Medeiros & Flores, 2017; Rogoski, Flores, Coêlho, Gauche, & Souza, 2015), empathy (Riquelme & Montero, 2013), engagement and social participation (Guevara, Queiroz, & Flores, 2017), fluency in the use of mathematical language (Purpura, Napoli, Wehrspann, & Gold, 2017), use of expressive resources (Lever & Senechal, 2011), among others.

Recently the study by Moraes and Flores (2020) with EJA students experimentally evaluated the effects of LuDiCa on the dialogue and the exchange of experiences, in four small groups of LuDiCa that read the book called *A Bolsa Amarela*, by Lygia Bojunga along a sequence of meetings. The results achieved with LuDiCa, in comparison with traditional reading (simple reading followed by debate) showed that the first is more frequently related to greater autonomy in taking the word (growing independence of the mediator), greater understanding of non-literal aspects of the narrative, and the potentialization of distancing movements (cf. Schlovsky, 1990/1929) in relation to the text (in which the participant reflects on events in the narrative, relating them to their experiences (Moraes & Flores, 2020). The authors, however, did not complement the quantitative data with a qualitative analysis of the construction and negotiation of meanings, nor of how dialogicity allowed and potentiated distancing movements. There was also little or no focus on conflicts emerging during the reading circles, even though conflicts are very frequent and perhaps they function as crucial moments in which beliefs and values are manifested and meanings are dialogically negotiated.

Considering that we live in a schooled society, in which great social importance is attributed to school education, that has the status of a right constitutionally guaranteed to all, the use of this methodology aims to identify the meanings that emerge from the intersubjective meeting between teacher and students, cultural animator and audience, or even between researcher and participants. Dialogical reading represents an opportunity for the circulation of words, ideas, beliefs and values. To that extent, we believe that the technique provides a path for the emergence and understanding of aspects of human development and learning that are relevant to improving youth and adult education towards a relational, systemic and interactionist perspective. The next section deals with values and its role within human development.

### **Culture, Values and Beliefs as Tools in the Educational Process**

We are social subjects, for whom being in relationship – within the most diverse contexts and throughout our existence – is a necessity. Therefore, we constitute ourselves as part of groups with which we create positive and negative affective bonds.

Culture is an intrinsic part of the social relationships, helping subjects in interaction to define the relevant ways of interpreting reality and meaning of experiences (Valsiner, 2014). Culture is not an entity, a property or a “thing” that someone “has” or “incorporates” (by assimilation or socialization), but rather the active process of mediation of signs in human lives, that occurs both in the intra and interpsychological context. Culture is therefore located in-between people and social worlds acting through feed-forward bi-directional mechanisms (Valsiner 2014). Culture is defined by this thinker (Valsiner, 2014) as a continuous process of semiotic mediation of human-environment relations. According to this understanding, culture is co-constructed by people who relate to one another, and act accordingly to achieve some goals. Through constant inter-personal negotiation, new meanings are co-constructed and, thus, communication occupies a prominent place in the analysis of semiotic-cultural processes.

Students’ values and belief systems, expressed in their daily interaction with classmates and the broader social context area a fertile ground for understanding educational phenomena. Beliefs and values are semiotic-cultural devices of a dynamic, complex nature, co-constructed within subject-culture interactions, but they are not defined by the past, instead they mediate the relationships between individuals and contexts allowing the projection of the individual thought towards the future. Beliefs are at the most superficial level and values are located at the deepest affective root of the motivational system. Once they are incorporated to the self-system, affectively incrustated beliefs can be converted into hyper generalized signs, giving rise to personal values and prejudices (Valsiner 2014). Thus, by paying attention to the processes of communication and meta-communication at different levels, it is possible to see that beliefs and values are essential factors in the inter-personal relationships between subjects, in the school setting, and they are co-constructed all time long, in social interactions (Roncancio-Moreno, 2013).

The empirical study presented below illustrates how the system of beliefs and values is present in the daily school life of young people and adults during a dialogic reading meeting. In view of the elements presented above, we reflect about the contribution of Cultural Psychology to educational processes, especially within EJA.

### **Two Reading Circles in the Context of a EJA Project: Analysis and Discussion**

The dialogic reading activities of the extension project “Livros Abertos – Aqui Todos Contam” are based on the following steps: (i) referral of reading mediators to school partner institutions in the project; (ii) definition of the participating groups in each school, together with the school management and indicated teachers, to be engaged in the reading circles. (iii) Dialogical reading sessions carried out weekly in the selected classrooms by a pair of trained mediators (undergraduate and graduate students, community members) as part of the routine for students in early literacy cycles. The books that will be read are previously chosen by the reading mediators, considering topics of interest to the students and their connections with specific subjects’ contents worked on by the teachers.

Here, we will give a brief account of two reading circles. They involved the same tale and mediators, but they were held at different moments to distinct groups. We present the two as a way to reflect on how dialogical processes are integrated to educational work in the EJA’s classroom.

Each session lasted around 40 minutes, and specific information about them is provided below. Through the analysis of the two sessions we intend to reflect on the various dialogical possibilities fostered by the methodology reading circle, in special, the negotiations of meanings that are presented, through the expression of the participants’ beliefs and values in face of the dialogical tensions related to the recognition of alterity, and the legitimacy of the other.

The reported session’s activities refer to the reading of the short story *O Reino de Palmares*, taken from the book *Viagem pelo Brasil em 52 Histórias*, by Silvana Salerno and with illustrations by Cárcamo, Companhia das Letrinhas, 2006. Let’s see the story:

**Reading Circle, Class 1:** The reading circle had the participation of three students from the First Stage (which corresponds to the 1st to 5th year of Regular Education) - two men and a woman aged between 40 and 50 years, the class teacher, and two mediators, one of them being the first author of this article, a lower quorum than usually because this day was a holiday eve. The activity usually had an average of eight to ten participants, the number of the class’s students.

The short history, as usual, fostered the emergence of issues linked to different forms of expression and types of prejudice experienced and witnessed by the participants, until at one point one of the students reported, somewhat aggressively, in agreement with popular assertions. that “all Indians are lazy and all blacks are rogues”, illustrating his thought with a reference to the candidate for the vice-president of the Republic in the 2018 elections: “that Indian, vice of that Boulos, another vagabond” (sic).

The group was surprised by the aggressivity and

intensity of the student’s utterance, visibly charged with hatred for black and indigenous people. Even greater surprise because the student has black skin. Trying to sustain the dialogic space and attentive to all the voices of the participants, the teacher questioned the reason for that assertion, and whether it was possible to perceive the different ways of life of people in different contexts. After all, how could he possibly make such a generalization? The student gradually got angrier, took his things and said he would leave, pointing to the teacher and saying he would do as she did. No one in the group claimed to have understood what he meant in relation to this conversation with the teacher. We agreed, wished the student good night, and continued with the activity, which was nearing its end.

The discussion that followed was related to the short story and the situation experienced by the group. Most students were apparently embarrassed by their colleague’s posture and tried to seek explanations for what had happened. The teacher explained that she had earlier reported to the students’ moments of a discussion between herself and another teacher where she reportedly said that she “was not obliged to listen to certain types of things” (sic) and left. Possibly this is what the student referred to when he said he would do as she did.

The teacher reported being very upset with the possibility that the student would, once again, stop attending school, and assumed she felt embarrassed about the consequences of her reaction previously reported to students, and how this served as a negative model that inspired that student’s attitude.

**Reading Circle, Class 2:** After two weeks of reading the same Tale in Class 1, we carried out the activity with Class 2, answering students’ requests for us to read Zumbi’s story, as they had heard comments that the text was very interesting.

The activity involved the participation of eight students, the class’s teacher and the same pair of mediators. As in class 1, several topics of conversation emerged, whose axis was situations where prejudice was explicitly expressed. However, in this case, the atmosphere among the people was welcoming, each bringing personal experiences that they had never reported before: the teacher spoke openly about her difficulty in dealing with the simple idea of her daughter coming out as a homosexual, in case one day it happens; one of the students spoke of the suffering she felt when she was rejected by her family after becoming pregnant as a teenager; and other people brought to the discussion how much they suffer from racial prejudice, or have lived through painful, exclusionary situations involving other people’s discrimination. One student even said that she does not feel capable of taking care of her own children, and that it took her a long time

### **The Palmares Kingdom**

This story began in 1597, when forty slaves fled a mill in Alagoas, which at the time was part of the captaincy of Pernambuco. The group took refuge in the forest of Serra da Barriga, and amidst a large number of palm trees, they founded the quilombo, which received the name Palmares because of the palm trees that existed there.

In a short time, the quilombolas turned Palmares into a city. The blacks who managed to escape slavery did not think twice: the destination was the Serra da Barriga.

With the constant arrival of people, including Indians and outlawed whites, mocambos were formed, which functioned as villages: bringing together various groups of houses, reproducing the political and economic organization of Africa. The Mocambo of Macaco was the administrative seat of the quilombo, ruled by Ganga Zumba, the first king of Palmares.

A few years after its foundation, the quilombo was invaded by an expedition; many inhabitants were killed, even children. A newborn was taken by the invaders and given to Padre Antônio Melo, in Recife. Baptized with the name of Francisco, he was raised and educated by the religious. The boy learned to read and write, was initiated into the study of Latin and the Bible, and at age twelve he was an altar boy. Contrary to what happened at the time, Padre Melo raised the boy as a son, not as a servant.

As he grew up, Francisco saw the treatment given to blacks, who were often humiliated and publicly flogged, and he could not accept it. For this reason, despite the affection he felt for his adoptive father, at the age of fifteen he fled to Palmares. After walking one hundred and thirty-two kilometers, the boy arrived at Serra da Barriga, where he gained a family and a new name: Zumbi.

In the quilombos, land was common; each person planted and cultivated a small part. But, as there were practically only men in the mocambos, at night they made raids on the farms, to look for women and encourage other men to follow them.

The quilombo expanded so much that it became a kingdom. It brought together several quilombos, which occupied the entire forest between Santo Agostinho Cape, on the coast of Pernambuco, and the São Francisco river, in Bahia. In moments of peace, the quilombolas devoted themselves to plantations and cattle raising. They sought to recreate the culture brought from Africa, which united and strengthened them: religion, food, rites, festivals, music and dance.

Meanwhile, in a short time Zumbi surpassed his teammates in intelligence and courage. At seventeen he became a general in arms of the quilombo, which would correspond to a minister of war.

He used all his creativity to defend Palmares, who was constantly attacked. As government forces were unable to destroy the black kingdom, in 1678 Pedro de Almeida, governor of the captaincy of Pernambuco, offered freedom to all those born in Palmares who agreed to move to Cucaú, in southern Pernambuco. Ganga Zumba, the leader of Palmares, agreed, but Zumbi decided to stay in the quilombo, where he mounted resistance.

The peace pact was a trap: Ganga Zumba was killed, and Zumbi assumed the post of king and the fight to defend the conquest of his people. To fight it, the government sent a band of soldiers commanded by the pioneer Domingos Jorge Velho, a mercenary, a man paid to fight. But Zumbi's army managed to defeat them.

The king of Palmares created a system of moats around the quilombos and strengthened the mocambos with a triple palisade. To get food and ammunition, he attacked farms and plantations, and with each attack the bosses and the police mounted an operation to hunt down the fugitives.

The first free government in all of America was so strong that it disrupted the rhythm of slave labor throughout the region. For three years, the Army was defeated by the quilombolas.

Willing to reverse the situation, João da Cunha Souto Maior, the new governor, led, with Domingos Jorge Velho, a large expedition that brought together three thousand men and several war chiefs. There were many battles. One morning in 1694, Souto Maior's expedition carried out a special action: the entire army attacked at once, entering the quilombo from all sides. After overcoming many barriers, he approached Macaco's hovel. The palisades were blown down with an ax, the houses set on fire, and the population slaughtered.

In the seventeenth attack by government forces, the Palmares quilombo was finally razed to the ground. From Zumbi's kingdom, only a few black stones remain from the fortifications, which can still be seen in the middle of the mountain range. The black kingdom lasted for nearly a century.

But Zumbi managed to flee with a small group to the Dois Irmãos mountain range and supported the guerrillas. Months later, he was betrayed by one of his top commanders, who got his freedom in exchange for revealing the resistance's hideout. Trapped in an ambush, the last king of Palmares was killed on November 20, 1695. In his honor, this date became the Nacional Day of Black Consciousness.

**(Inspired in oral tradition)**

to recognize this. The teacher, in turn, highlighted how important she considers it is to get to know the students and their lives in order to plan the best form of “transmission” (sic) of the curricular contents.

When compared to Class 1, we notice that students in Class 2 used the time of the Reading Circle for the construction of a space of trust, where several participants addressed situations of prejudice, non-acceptance and suffering, having as starting point a text that addresses the past of the Brazilian black and indigenous people, a past full of struggles for independence, equality and self-assertion of the various ethnic groups that comprise it, from the most remote historical records.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In both circumstances in which the text was presented, we identify episodes in which the interaction among the participants favored the negotiation and co-construction of meanings and, possibly, of development. Our hypothesis is that by intentionally creating, in the school context, opportunities for the recognition of the otherness, new possibilities to produce meanings and, therefore, for learning, and transforming self-perspectives arise.

The dynamics of Circle 1 and Circle 2 are clearly different, and it is possible to perceive different forms of dialogical movement between the participants. In the first session, one of the meaningful moments was marked by the posture adopted by the student who openly expressed his personal position as part of a different field of meanings from the group. In that circumstance, he was unable to argue or negotiate his belief system, he chose to interrupt the dialogue and leave the classroom. From the point of view of analyzing the dialogic processes involved, some aspects can be highlighted in this episode, as follows.

The first aspect refers to the denial of a dialogical stance, that led to what Bakhtin (1993) called the monologic discourse. Monologism means disregarding the other’s radically different ideological position through the very annihilation of the communicative situation. By doing this, not only does the student lose the chance, but deprives the other people involved in the activity of the opportunity for debate, even though the reflection and reverberation about what had happened continued, at that time, among the remnants who, impacted by the event, continued the discussion in the hallways of the school.

The second aspect points to the role of imagination and identification processes that underlie the discursive positions of each interlocutor in an interaction. Utterances always bring fragments of past interactions to the present situation as well as impact on future interactions (which can be illustrated by the repercussion

of the firstly described activity in other classes of the school, afterwards). For Bakhtin (1993), every statement is an answer built up on previous statements. In this aspect, it is interesting to analyze the peculiar way in which the teacher’s narrative, addressed to the students, about a disturbing interpersonal event with a fellow professor, was incorporated into the episode with the student in the statement “*I’ll do it like you*”. There are countless interpretative possibilities and interesting reflections for the educational field that result from this short statement by the student. He talks about power relations, the right of each student to their own belief system and opinion and, at the same time, how the exercise of this right implies that teachers and mediators learn to reflect on how and when to intervene. For example, how to act when beliefs, values and prejudices have interpersonal and even legal implications, as in cases of racism, homophobia, etc.

The student alludes to the teacher’s attitude as a possible educational model reproduced by him, on how to behave in conflicting situations. The situation highlights that the school is configured not only as a space for learning curriculum content, but also as a space that hosts possible forms of relationship among individuals and society, based on the interpretations of the reality that each one builds. In this sense, group activities are a rich opportunity for this.

The third aspect we would like to address concerns the intimate interdependence between the nature of the personal value system, of which the person is not always aware, and their discursive positions in particular communicative situations. Branco and Lopes de Oliveira (2018) emphasizes the importance of the developmental processes that result from the possibility of reflection and moral reasoning about interaction practices with others. We can observe the presence of this movement of reflection in both Dialogic Reading sessions with the participants’ expression of ethical conceptions about the reverberations of their positions and worldviews on various aspects of their personal life in interaction with the context in which transit and are inserted.

Finally, we highlight the openness to the alterity in the school context as the assumption of a dialogic stance, which can be seen in the posture of both teachers. The two put themselves into the activities in the circle at the same level as the other participants, without, however, disregarding the hierarchy inherent in the positions of apprentice and master. In terms of contributing to reflections about human developmental processes along adult life, it is important to highlight the opening moment, instigated by the teacher, for the sharing of intimate stories, as illustrated in Reading Circle 2. Something previously unheard of, according to the teacher’s report at the end of the meeting, the activity favored the emergence of new fields of

meanings related to trust and welcoming in the group, with the potential to expand possible directions for human development. Furthermore, when learning about the lives of others, people understand and welcome differences better and create new ways of relating, as illustrated by the teacher when she affirms the importance of getting to know students for the planning of classes to be taught.

Marsico (2018) brings us to reflect on how porous the boundaries between the school institution and the context of people's lives are, placing education on the border between micro cultures or systems, such as family-school, for example. Thus, it is possible to affirm that education, as a culturally sedimented phenomenon, is characterized by occurring on the threshold, expanding horizons and "moving" our borders and horizons forward.

According to the reports of the teachers who participated in the interventions reported in this text, EJA is a teaching modality that allows for greater flexibility than others, in terms of workload, content sequence, series, etc., in which learning situations are dealt with a certain degree of plasticity. In view of these characteristics, both teachers reported seeking tools that promote an approximation between the mandatory content of the modules and the students' personal experience, in order to provide greater motivation to the group that, as a rule, has a history of discontinuity in school attendance.

Meeting the limitations highlighted above, Nunes and Moura (2019) address the need to fill the gap between the teaching knowledge that guides the practice of teachers working in EJA in order to create a more direct connection between academia and reality of classrooms, this being a possibility of deepening new researches to produce knowledge and increase the professional practices of educators.

We also consider that the promotion of dialogic spaces, especially through group activities, should acquire a capital importance among the teaching methodologies adopted at EJA, as these methodologies contribute to the achievement of broader goals in terms of student development, in addition to their simple preparation for entry into the labor market.

As we sought to demonstrate in the above analysis, the differences between the dynamics of the two classes did not prevent the emergence and negotiation, to a greater or lesser extent, of fields of meaning and values that need to be the object of attention in the school context, paying attention to the fact that the dialogue in the first group generated a response in the second, reverberating in the whole school community.

One of the possibilities for facing the challenges that present themselves in the educational context of EJA would be, therefore, the investment in promoting the

*quality* of interaction between teachers and students. Better relations could be built through activities such as dialogic reading, mainly when it joins aspects of the school curriculum and the expression of personal experiences and meanings, produced individually and socially.

We realized that schools present themselves as public equipment with diametrically contradictory functions. If, on the one hand, some of their current attributions consist in the adaptation and social adjustment of students, on the other hand, such institutions are tailored to encourage curiosity, creativity, autonomy, and the construction of new knowledge and ideas (Branco & Lopes de Oliveira, 2018). Therefore, we conclude that, through the expression and reflection in groups characterized by dialogical practices - such as the reading circles, and the activities planned to encourage debates and discussions on socially relevant issues and affectively important content educators are capable of promoting, in a more comprehensive and effective way, conditions for the global development of their students.

We consider schools as important instruments for social transformation and personal development by promoting the dissemination and construction of knowledge. Schools have the potential to contribute to reducing the deep inequalities characteristic of the context in which we live and producing more critical and creative ways of being in the social world. Thus, it is necessary to expand the studies, especially in the theoretical perspective developed in School Psychology, on the educational modalities of young people and adults, in emergent situations in this educational context, in order to encourage the production of new paths for educators and students.

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