



## Narrative: knowledge and affectivity in a youth and adult education class

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**ABSTRACT.** This article aims to analyze the interrelationship between affectivity, school knowledge and cognitive development that are evidenced in the teaching and learning practices of a youth and adult education class. To think the subject in its material, cultural, and existential life conditions, as well as in its relations with the practices of learning, I took as my theoretical reference the studies of Vygotsky and collaborators. Considering that the dimension of the singularity of subjects is central to the understanding of the organization and transformations of affectivity, I privileged, in the construction of the data, the description and analysis of the interactive dynamics, established and mediated by language and, within them, the indications of the unique configuration of the experiences lived by individuals in their own singular history. To collect the empirical data, I used the qualitative-ethnographic approach. I recorded, in a 'field diary', interactive episodes produced in the classroom, involving the students, the teacher and myself. In recording the fragments, I observed the social conditions of production of the interactions, as well as the words, gestures, writings, and attitudes assumed by the subjects involved in them. For the construction, organization, and interpretation of the empirical data, I considered narrativization as an adequate technique to present the subjects in the interactive dynamics in which they were inserted, in the richness of their words, gestures, expressions, without losing sight of their interlocutors. Through this technique, I could give visibility to the intonations, to the time, to the very interactive movement in which the reciprocal affections were being revealed. The evidence suggests that it is knowledge that modulates pedagogical relations in the classroom. The learning and the not learning of knowledge (programmatic contents) arouse emotional and affective expressions of joy, sadness, refusal, indifference, motivation, pleasure, which are indicated in body gestures, verbal and non-verbal language

**Keywords:** affectivity; knowledge; cognition; learning.

## Narrativa: conhecimento e afetividade em classe de educação de jovens e adultos

**RESUMO.** Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar a inter-relação afetividade, conhecimentos escolares e desenvolvimento cognitivo que se evidenciam nas práticas de ensino e aprendizagem de uma classe de educação de jovens e adultos. Para pensar o sujeito em suas condições de vida material, cultural e existencial, bem como em suas relações com as práticas do aprender, tomei como referencial teórico os estudos de Vigotski e colaboradores. Considerando-se que a dimensão da singularidade dos sujeitos é central à compreensão da organização e das transformações da afetividade, privilegiei, na construção dos dados, a descrição e análise da dinâmica interativa, instaurada e mediada pela linguagem e, dentro delas, os indícios da configuração única das experiências vividas pelos indivíduos em sua própria história singular. Para a coleta dos dados empíricos, recorro à abordagem qualitativa-etnográfica. Registrei, em 'diário de campo', episódios interativos produzidos na sala de aula, envolvendo os alunos e alunas, a professora e eu mesmo. No registro dos fragmentos, observei as condições sociais de produção das interações, bem como os dizeres, gestos, escritas e posturas assumidas pelos sujeitos nelas envolvidos. Para a construção, organização e interpretação dos dados empíricos, considerei a narrativização como uma técnica adequada para apresentar os sujeitos nas dinâmicas interativas em que estavam inseridos, na riqueza de seus dizeres, gestos, expressões, sem perder de vista igualmente, seus interlocutores. Por meio dessa técnica, eu poderia dar visibilidade às entonações, ao tempo, ao próprio movimento interativo em que os afetamentos recíprocos iam se deixando entrever. As evidências sugerem que é o conhecimento que modula as relações pedagógicas em sala de aula. O aprender e o não aprender os conhecimentos (conteúdos programáticos) suscitam expressões emocionais e afetivas de alegria, tristeza, recusa, indiferença, motivação, prazer, que são indicadas em gestos corporais, linguagem verbal e não verbal.

**Palavras-chave:** afetividade; conhecimento; cognição; aprendizagem.

## Narrativa: conocimiento y afectividad en la clase de educación para jóvenes y adultos escolares

**RESUMEN.** Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la interrelación del afecto, el conocimiento escolar y el desarrollo cognitivo que son evidentes en las prácticas de enseñanza y aprendizaje de una clase de educación para jóvenes y adultos. Para pensar sobre el tema en sus condiciones de vida material, cultural y existencial, así como en sus relaciones con las prácticas de aprendizaje, tomé como referencia teórica los estudios de Vigotski y sus colaboradores. Considerando que la dimensión de la singularidad de los sujetos es central para comprender la organización y las transformaciones de la afectividad, privilegié, en la construcción de los datos, la descripción y el análisis de la dinámica interactiva, establecida y mediada por el lenguaje y, dentro de ellos, la evidencia de Configuración única de las experiencias vividas por los individuos en su propia historia única. Para la recopilación de datos empíricos, utilicé el enfoque cualitativo-etnográfico. Grabé, en 'diario de campo', episodios interactivos producidos en el aula, en los que participaron alumnos, el profesor y yo. En el registro de los fragmentos, observé las condiciones sociales de producción de las interacciones, así como los dichos, gestos, escritos y posturas asumidas por los sujetos involucrados en ellas. Para la construcción, organización e interpretación de datos empíricos, consideré la narrativización como una técnica adecuada para presentar a los sujetos en la dinámica interactiva en la que se insertaron, en la riqueza de sus dichos, gestos, expresiones, sin perder de vista a sus interlocutores por igual. La evidencia sugiere que es el conocimiento el que modula las relaciones pedagógicas en el aula. El aprendizaje y el no aprendizaje (contenido del programa) provocan expresiones emocionales y afectivas de alegría, tristeza, rechazo, indiferencia, motivación, placer, que se indican en los gestos corporales, el lenguaje verbal y no verbal.

**Palabras clave:** afectividad; conocimiento; cognición; aprendizaje.

Received on April 29, 2020.

Accepted on May 18, 2020.

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

#### Affective motives

I've learned that it always depends / On so many different people  
 Every person is always the mark / Of the daily lessons of so many other people.  
 And it is so beautiful when we understand / That we are so many people (Gonzaguinha, 1982)<sup>2</sup>.

In this initial topic - Introduction - I try to make a brief contextualization of my belonging to Youth and Adult Education (YAE) and present the emotive motives of what I intend to apprehend as the object of this article.

Vygotsky, in many of his texts (1999; 2000a; 2000b; 2000c; 2001a; 2001b; 2003; 2004; Vygotski, Luria, & Leontiev, 1988), leaves marks to the theoretical orientation on the constitution of the human being, which is made of social relations and interactions. The hominization takes place in the arena of history and culture. Thus, the explanation for the constitution of the individualities of lives cannot be sought in other instances than that of their historicities and the forms of relations in which they were established.

We are constituted in social interactions, in intersubjective exchanges - I-other-others -, always mediated by knowledge, in the symbolic terrain of culture. This learning, necessary for the formation of our humanity, cannot be done in silencing, in the mechanical task of reproducing letters and words, but in the sharing between people, as the poet, in his verses, captured very well in the epigraph of this introduction. Those terms that we use, today, as subjectivity, singularity, identity are constituted in social relations. Thus, both for Vygotsky, in the academic field, and for Gonzaguinha, in literature, subjectivity is this weaving that carries the marks of the daily lessons that we learn and apprehend with so many, many, many other people.

This understanding imposes a direction when looking, researching, and analyzing the sociocultural environment that constitutes the EJA classes. Open lives: different ways, different behaviors, conflicting modes: silences, quietness, agitation, patience, rebellion, lost looks, concentration. How to understand this

<sup>1</sup> It should be clarified that, at the time this research was carried out, the University/Post-Graduation Program, to which it was linked, did not yet have mechanisms for the registration of authorization protocols for Academic Research Projects. However, in order to carry out the participant observation and empirical data collection work, the researcher strictly followed the scientific methodology guidelines recommended for research work in the qualitative/case study modality. The Youth and Adult Education Board (EJA), in addition to authorizing the research, after examining the aforementioned Project, also provided transportation and the presence of a technician to accompany the researcher in the visits to the several EJA centers in order to choose which one would be appropriate to his objectives. At the school, the person responsible for EJA was consulted and authorized the research. In the classroom, the teacher, after consulting the class and explaining the research objectives and the conditions for the research to be carried out, authorized the researcher's presence in the classroom. To preserve ethical principles, all sensitive data involving students, pupils, teachers, school, and the municipality were designated by fictitious names.

<sup>2</sup> Aprendi que se depende sempre / De tanta muita diferente gente

Toda pessoa sempre é as marcas / Das lições diárias de outras tantas pessoas.

É é tão bonito quando a gente entende / Que a gente é tanta gente. (Gonzaguinha, 1982).

universe of existential situations, of singularities? What conditions of hominization have these students had or have access to? Under what conditions have they been singularizing themselves in the EJA programs? Thought-provoking questions.

Acceleration Classes! For as Arroyo (2000) rightly analyzes, when he calls attention to the fact that social exclusion and selectivity reproduced by social and educational institutions, "[...] is not a nightmare nor a temporary fruit, unripe, that we can ripen in times of progression and acceleration, in special chambers (classes). One-off solutions for structural problems" (Arroyo, 2000, p. 43).

Youth and Adult Education (YAE) and its subjects - adolescents, adults, old people, old women, teachers - have been imbricated in my experience - theoretical and practical - for a long time, leaving indelible marks in me. I am encouraged by the understanding that subjects constitute themselves historically, reproducing and going beyond the structural determinations that, at first sight, seem inexorable. Sociologically, I admit that an educational modality offered by the State is not above individuals, as a solely coercive force and as the bearer of a mechanical determinism (the school as a locus of reproduction) hermetically impermeable to the contradictory movement, to a dialectical relationship between macro and microstructures. Multiple contradictions and complexities permeate the actions of the State. The educational process is equally full of contradictions, for we must consider these complexities to think of alternative solutions for education. Gadotti (1983) says that trying to work this contradiction presents itself as a challenge to be faced in the implementation of a popular education.

These theoretical contributions turned me to examine the daily production of teaching and learning relations and the subjects involved in it. In this path, my questions/concerns were centered on the following assumptions: the learning process, aimed at EJA students, cannot ignore their specificities, their diversities and singularities; nor see them only as subjects of cognition, but as subjects of multiple dimensions, including the cognitive and socio affective. The affective dimension, as constitutive of the production process of teaching and learning relations, that is, of the teacher-student-knowledge relations, started to center my attention. I started to take it as an indispensable dimension to understand the learning process in EJA classes without, however, disregarding the structural conditions of production of material life and of education itself as a space of symbolic production.

Thus, in face of the emotional reasons exposed, this article aims to analyze the interrelationship between affectivity, school knowledge, and cognitive development that are evidenced in the teaching and learning practices of a youth and adult education class.

Next, I try to present my understanding about the relationship between affectivity-knowledge-cognition-pedagogical practices of teaching and learning in a YAE class.

### **Approximations: affectivity, knowledge and cognition**

I am only when in verse. / [ ...]

To reach where / I do not presume myself, but I am,  
I follow in the form of words (Mello, 2001, p. 27)<sup>3</sup>.

In the daily life of Youth and Adult Education (YAE), among many professionals - and even in the out-of-school environment - there is a generalized opinion that the students in this type of education are needy, especially affectively needy. Poor things, these students are very lacking in affection,' we almost always hear. The rebelliousness, the anger, the 'messiness', the withdrawn behavior, the indifference to learning activities, the abandonment of the class - all, generally, attributed to the lack of affection, lack of love, lack of self-esteem.

The structural exclusion - economic, social, cultural; educational selectivity, with its precarious schools, is justified by this puerile psychologism. Those excluded from material goods are seen as affectively needy. Patto (1993), in *A produção do fracasso escolar*, makes a critical review of these "psychologies of need", in the topic about "Racist theories". Decades have passed since their publication, and yet, these 'psychologies' still populate the predominant common sense of the educational environment for children, youth, and adults in situations of socioeconomic and cultural/educational exclusion.

The issue starts from the suspicion that the affective is not only in the lack, in the deprivation, which would be intrinsic, or even a psychological disposition of the individual-student. We seek to demonstrate

<sup>3</sup> Somente sou quando em verso. / [ ...]

Para chegar até onde / não me presumo, mas sou,  
sigo em forma de palavra

the interrelationship between affectivity-knowledge-cognition-pedagogical practices of teaching and learning. Synthetically, we assume that the affective dimension and pedagogical practice - with its programmatic contents - provoke or trigger the affective and cognitive perceptions and demands.

Thus, with this assumption we analyze the interrelation between affectivity and knowledge and the constitution of subjects in school practices (learning to read and write) in EJA classes. And, as a corollary, we consider that the affective is an inseparable mediator of the appropriation of this knowledge, thus evidencing the inseparability between knowledge and cognitive development.

In theoretical and methodological terms, we sought to focus on the interactive dynamics in its happening, in its movement, in its production process in the classroom and, in it, to capture the signs of the cognitive-affective manifestations and interactions that took place in the teaching relationships.

How, then, would this affective dimension materialize in these relationships? It would manifest itself in the symbolic field, in the signs: in the words, in the gestures, in the looks, in the facial expressions, in the tone in which the words are pronounced, in the silences, in the absences from the classroom - all of them understood from the perspective that they mean something because they are historically constituted, that is, they are born in the relationships between socially situated subjects.

### Looking for a corner

The field research was conducted in an EJA class, in a municipal school, located in Bosque dos Arvoredos, on the outskirts of Primavera do Sol - a beautiful and rich city in the interior of São Paulo state. The teacher, kind and welcoming, was trying, with her technical and didactic knowledge, to teach literacy to a class composed of restless 14 to 18 years old and adults of average age, and a few aged 50 to 62, approximately.

Vygotsky (2000a; 2004), in his theoretical-methodological approach, recommends that the study of a phenomenon should be carried out in its social and immediate conditions of production. And, considering, based on this author, that the dimension of the singularity of subjects is central to the understanding of the organization and transformations of affectivity, I privileged, in the construction of data, the description and analysis of interactive dynamics, established and mediated by language and, within them, the evidence of the unique configuration of experiences lived by individuals in their own unique history.

Thus, in accordance with the above recommendation, I resorted to a qualitative-ethnographic approach (André, 1995). In the classroom, as an observer, I recorded in my 'field diary', for about two school semesters, interactive episodes produced in the classroom, involving the students, the teacher and myself. In recording the fragments, I observed the social conditions of production of the interactions, as well as the words, gestures, writings, and postures assumed by the subjects involved in them.

Throughout the observations, my attention was directed to some students, young or adult, who presented some singularity in the interactive moments, through their gestures, attitudes, body language, their rare verbalizations, and the long silences they remained in their desks during the classes. Thus, with effort and academic discipline, I tried to describe, in detail, the experience and life of the students' interactions with knowledge, with the teacher, and with themselves.

During out-of-class moments, such as when students come in, during snack time, I would take the opportunity to talk to the teacher, or to some student, aiming to understand or learn more details about their lives and their perceptions about the condition of teacher and student. This effort to capture the details, to register the minutiae, led me to transform some students into unique characters.

For the construction, organization, and interpretation of the empirical data, I considered narrativization as an adequate technique to present the subjects in the interactive dynamics in which they were inserted, in the richness of their words, gestures, expressions, without losing sight of their interlocutors. Through this technique, I could give visibility to the intonations, to the time, to the very interactive movement in which the reciprocal affections were being revealed.

I call this technique of detailed description of the characters, the scenario, the interlocutions between them, and their verbal and non-verbal reactions narrativization. In this, I try to give visibility to the ways in which the subjects relate to others, to words, to the knowledge involved in the situations, without neglecting the social conditions of their production.

I also call the reader's attention to the fact that, in the narrative moment itself, I analyze and highlight the signs of affective relations that are being woven in the classroom, mediated by the knowledge in

circulation and cognitive elaboration. I think it is important to emphasize that I am using the term "narrative" to deal with my experience as a researcher in the classroom, my experience of approaching the affective weaves that are woven between the subjects, in their interactions with knowledge, in their process of cognitive development.

In the following, I describe fragments of the pedagogical relationships that develop in the classroom, and, at the same time, I analyze the interactions that take place between affectivity, knowledge, and cognition. The empirical and analytical focus is on a singular character, a student, an adult, here fictitiously called Mrs. Maria José.

### **The narrative - 'Can't you change it a little?'**

"Dialogue cannot exist without a deep love for the world and for people" (Freire, 1980, p. 83)<sup>4</sup>.

### **A certain day at school**

As in the previous days of observation, in her predictable and usual practice, the teacher passes the exercise on the blackboard: '1) let's remember the vowels; 2) the consonants; 3) give the plural of the words: can, trash, box, ticket, dozen, olive, salad, drink [...]'. Pupils keep coming; they sit, in silence; they copy the material. The adults, in silence. The teenagers, in happy chatter.

A few desks away, a little far from me, a lady named Maria José, in her fictitious name, also, in her predictable routine, daily observed, begins her vowel practice rosary. She makes some grainy, irregular letters that fill practically all the space between lines. Sometimes she stops copying, looks at the board, and then resumes the activity; then she looks at her notebook, to one side, to the other, always in silence. He stops writing and starts again, apparently indifferent to everything that happens in the classroom. His head low, just the movements of his hands. Fragments of the book *The Repeating Girl* come to mind: "A girl's silence is a symptom, not only of refusal, of lack, but also of desires, it is necessary to empower this speech and signify this silence" (Abramowicz, 1995, p. 60).

The teacher interrupts her writing on the board and approaches Maria José: "Every day we have to go there, doing everything again, remember? - She says, after examining the notebook of the student, who, in her uninterrupted, repetitive, and unperturbed task of copying vowels and numbers, barely looks at the teacher. Lia is at the board doing syllable separation: noodles. "- What's the matter, Nestorino, are you out of noodles?" - jokes the teacher. He smiles. And he carefully watches the syllable separation. Socorro calmly copies. "- She's whimsical, look at the whimsy." The teacher shows me her neat notebook. The letters are neatly done. On the paper, you can see that she erases many times until the letter gets a nice shape. Her notebook is clean and neat. She is the wife of Mr. Nestorino. But they rarely speak to each other in class. She seems to seek perfection in handwriting. Her hand glides slowly over the paper. And suddenly, the eraser erases everything. Sacrifice, dedication, compensation, a legible, regular, beautiful handwriting. Meanwhile, at her desk, Dona Maria José looks at her notebook, brings her hands to her eyes, then rests her chin on one hand, looks around the room. Finally, she lowers her head, takes the pencil, and starts writing the vowels again.

The teacher, attentive and vigilant in her teaching profession, approaches her. "- What letter is that?" - she asks, pointing to a specific letter. "- A, E, I, O, U" - goes Maria José reading, all the vowels, in a machinal way, very quickly, like someone who just memorized them. The teacher, for her part, seemed content with that mechanical reading. "Now we're going to put the letters together, but we need to know if you already recognize the letters. Come on, write the letter 'a' now, without looking at the notebook. Mrs. Maria José hesitates, looks at the teacher, tries to look at the notebook. "- Without looking at the notebook!" - the teacher stops her. She wriggles and wriggles in her desk, uncomfortable, looks at the teacher, to the side, away. She can't write the letter 'a'. With an impatient smile, the teacher asks, "- How can you not remember? You just did! You must put the letters together, hold each other's hands, if you can't I'll keep passing the vowels" - she says in a subtly threatening tone. The teacher shows the vowels to Mrs. Maria José, pointing to them in her notebook.

I watch that lady, frowning, in a sad look, searching for a fixed point. The teacher walks away. Others demand her presence. She has been copying these vowels for days and now the teacher is taking her lesson and she doesn't even recognize the "a" that she has drawn so tirelessly for so many times. The mechanical exercise to which she is subjected seems to have no positive effect. She copies the same letters dozens of

<sup>4</sup> O diálogo não pode existir sem um profundo amor pelo mundo e pelos homens.

times but doesn't recognize them. A purely mechanical exercise. Poor Maria, she still has a lot of letter copying ahead of her. The school is invested with literacy practices that she cannot appropriate, which reminds me of the character in *Infância*, by Graciliano Ramos (2009), in his beginning learning of letters, with the character narrating that his literacy began on the counter of his father's sale, with the indication of five letters and that "[...] the next day others appeared, then others - and began the slavery imposed cunningly" (Ramos, 2009, p. 110). A certain analogical relationship seems to be evident between the practice of learning the written language, narrated in *Infância* (Ramos, 2009), and the one experienced by D. Maria José, which persist through time, centered on mechanical memorization and decontextualization.

### School Break

As I hand out cookies and Professor Zeza fills the students' glasses with a liquid that, with great difficulty, we identify some banana flavor; she takes the opportunity to make the following comment:

"— Have you seen Maria José? She finishes reading the little letters, I ask her: what letter is that?'. 'I don't know,' she says. Now I tell her to put the 'o' and the 'a' together. And I ask, she says she doesn't know. Her notebook is full of letters. She says: can't you change it a little? Then I change it a little. But I ask her the letter and she doesn't know anymore. Nestorino said: 'I have to learn, I'm getting old, stupid. I said, "You will learn, slowly, but you will learn. Then he said, "I don't want to do just that, I want to learn Primavera do Sol..." — Then with him, I did the reverse process, but from time to time I'm by his side... ... [demanding the letters]".

In the words of the teacher, one can perceive the indications of her vigilance about the episteme of her methodology and her practice. In alert, one does not neglect that literacy has its rhythm and its norm: the arduous and rigid learning of the little letters. "Then, with him, I did the opposite, but from time to time I'm on his side...". I am expected to do the letters, that is, to make long and tedious copies of vowels and consonants, on pages that are endless. Epistemological vigilance!

A lady named Maria José asks the teacher for a change. She no longer wants to spend class after class, day after day, copying vowels, filling pages and pages with vowels without knowing how to recognize them, putting 'o' and 'a' together. Maria José does not find in her relationship with writing and reading. The joy and pleasure, also translated into affection, for recognizing herself progressing, learning, appropriating knowledge, she does not have. Before her, there is the wall of writing and reading to overcome, hard and difficult work, and, so far, with no reward. Sacrifice, only, is what hovers on her horizon as a learner. She is dissatisfied with her learning, and the relationship of knowledge that school practice offers her does not satisfy her either. She wants to possess the letters and enjoy the 'luxury' of reading and writing, overcoming the barriers of illiterate servitude. In the classroom, in the inglorious struggle with the letters, she struggles to know and to be. But this struggle produces no results, no emotions of joy and satisfaction, only boredom and sadness. Everything seems like a chimera, fruitless work, as in the poem by Cecília Meireles (1985, p. 41): "It always carries my image / the submissive rebellion / of those who study all day / without reaching learning [...]".

In her more than 60 years of age, but with a physiognomy indicating some 70; high blood pressure complicating her life, she still finds strength and energy to fight with words and with a sterile learning; she lives in a neighborhood that is not considered at all. Estranged from her land, Alagoas, she lives the aridity of an apprenticeship, just like Sinhá Vitória, a character in *Vidas Secas* (Ramos, 1972), wandering through the sun-drenched ground, escaping from the Northeastern drought. Maria José flees from illiteracy, but faces the cultural wall that has historically stood in her way, not only for her, but for all the poor and excluded, living in the cracked and atrociously dry backlands or in the outskirts of the big and rich cities of São Paulo, like Primavera do Sol.

It seems to me that, tired of living in exclusion from the world of letters, she seeks the school to penetrate it. She wants to have this 'luxury', even at the end of her life, because to undertake possible utopias is what makes us human: subjects of desires. School for her, however, is not just the 'luxury' of being literate. In it, maybe she still dreams of finding encouragement, overcoming the loneliness of an exiled, migrant life, inserted in a sociocultural and economic context different from her own. And it is also a way to overcome the depression of a recent widow. But school, with its sterile, laborious and ungrateful method, in practice, makes these little 'luxuries' unfeasible. Daring, would it be, to feel part of a first and second stage EJA class? Whose goal is not to teach letters, to alphabetize: to read, write and do calculations in dignities of methods?

"— The doctor advised her to keep coming to school. It's better for her... She was recently widowed. She has high blood pressure... she takes controlled medicine" - the teacher told me, one day, while we were contemplating her in that solitary work of letter training, at her desk.

Brunette, long hair, very long, always in braids, dresses almost covering her feet. She came calmly, in slow steps. The notebook resting neatly on her arm, at chest height, the box of pencils, eraser and sharpener, everything about her reminds me of a diligent young girl in her schoolgirl air. Dream in the heart. Desire that vanishes in the relationship with the letters. Alone and lonely in the midst of so many people in the classroom, learning is presented to her as sowing without harvesting. The affective, in this relationship with reading and writing, is revealed in its most painful side: it is emotion in suffering.

In her silence, she remains in her desk, indifferent to the chatter of the teenagers, in their verbal raids; in their coming in and out of the room, dragging desks and pushing each other. Verbalizations, none; just the movement of hands over the notebook; the head waving to one side or the other, or the fixed gaze over those badly arranged letters, as if trying to scrutinize their elusive meanings.

In her old age, in a society that tolerates the old and without the defense of accumulated goods, Maria José, alone, without a husband, settled in a neighborhood of migrants, removed from other "invasions", mostly poor like her, comes to school, which opens its doors to the disinherited of letters, although, inside, contradictorily, it closes those same doors, denying access to knowledge through a pedagogical practice that, historically, bears the marks of exclusion.

The teacher at her side, patient but demanding, helping her. And one day, maybe, once the rebellious letters were tamed, she would be able to write her name: Maria José. But, however, everything was going on to no avail. Days and days of endless work, with no fruit to enjoy. What use will the letters be to her yet? What use will this "little knowledge" be, which she hardly strives to learn, and which the teacher has instilled in her in bits and pieces?

In her struggle with the letters, in her silence, lonely and depressed, she is the subject of the search for meaning in her present life. At school she doesn't find the space to share the experiences and knowledge she has acquired throughout her 60 years. And to take them as objects for reflection and learning of letters. He doesn't find the reciprocity of interlocution, woven in conversation, in the discussion of opinions and ideas, in the exchange of "advice". He finds the letter empty of meaning, which, although it requires efforts and sacrifices, inherent to learning, in this case, seems to lead nowhere, as it does not lead to that expected moment, after hard work, of the fruition of joy, the greatest emotion desired by every human being.

### Another day at School

Maria José watches her colleagues go to the board. She seems absorbed, as if magnetized, attracted by that process, by that relationship that unfolds in front of her and from which she is excluded. One and another go to the board; they make mistakes, they get it right, they laugh; the teacher helps; another classmate helps, gives an opinion, sometimes wrong, but there is life there, there is interlocution in learning. Their lips move as if tasting that relationship, sensing a flavor different from the one they have been experiencing in the isolation and solitude of their arid tasks.

In front of her, a different image appears almost every day, one or the other goes to the blackboard. And she? No! Always, alone, with her notebook, in open sheets and in covered, irregular and misshapen 'letters', to be sure. They, her classmates, even some of the older ones, are chosen, and called by the teacher to go to the board. She does not. Only sporadic and spaced contact with the teacher, to whose authority she makes a timid request: "Can't you change it a little?", almost in a whisper.

If there is, therefore, an authority that regulates; if there is obedience; between the cracks in this authority, there are signs of life; life that shows its discontent; a life that, between the appearances of fragility and passive acceptance, exposes emotional and affective marks of contestation; the germ of a behaved rebellion? Almost inaudible, her voice seems to give visibility to the protest against the learning relationship she experiences. It is, no doubt, a behaved, polite cry, why not to say. But in it, the protest is threaded, the disapproval is full and clear. He chose the form considered civilized, the appropriate words to address the authority, "— Can't you change it a little?" In humility his discontent is shown. She has said her word and by saying it, she insinuates herself into desires for subversion of her condition as a student in sadness and posited loneliness.

Her request to change reveals her contained desire to experience significant learning, emotionally, affectively, and cognitively. Interactions with knowledge that would allow her to know herself, to advance, to read and write with meaning. What cognitive emotion would she enjoy by putting 'o' and 'a' together at the teacher's request?  $O + A = OA$ . Empty task of meanings and senses and, finally, of some feeling. In the word, affective-volitional elements are indicated (Vygotsky, 2000a).

For her, it is necessary to have an experience with writing that is not reduced to a mere copy of alphabet fragments, but a writing that establishes an interlocution with the classmates, with her colleagues, with the teacher herself, and that carries the marks of her sociocultural context; a writing, therefore, that is inscribed in her universe of senses and meanings, in which she can recognize herself as an author and reader. This practice hinders the movement that the subject makes towards the appropriation of knowledge. Instead of constituting itself, it annihilates itself in the relationship with writing and reading. The affective investment of closeness turns into estrangement, destruction. Emotion of refusal. That simple and nice recorded image - arriving at school with notebooks neatly over his arm, hair neatly braided, clothes clean and ironed, looking forward, chin up - lets transpire a certain air of grandeur and importance. In the classroom, however, tired, she sits on her desk, unimportant, without greatness, facing the meaningless learning that the State arranges for poor people like her.

### Review class - end of the semester

We seek words / that can tell / of our crafts.  
But all, though / sprung from the depths, / slip, slide  
over the layer / of time and distance (Mello, 2001, p. 29)<sup>5</sup>.

Today's activity: 1) reading; 2) review. It is 7:25 pm. Gentle conversation takes place between the teacher and her students. Before she starts writing on the board, she explains her lesson for today and shows her concern for the learning of the "little letters" in her class. There are only a few days left of school and attendance has now become much more irregular and rarefied.

"— Today I'm going to work just with revision with them, work a lot of revision, reading the words, it's like this... literacy really... Those who are going to pass to the 3rd grade can no longer have doubts about the 'little letters'" - she explains to me.

She then sits in the middle of the room and leads the class. She indicates students and asks them to write the words she dictates. Some have a lot of difficulty writing. She repeats, corrects, spells letter by letter, syllable by syllable, with a certain irritation and discomfort at the constant mistakes. Meanwhile, a lady named Maria José, in calm and solitude, works on copying the vowels, so as not to escape the routine she lived during the whole school semester.

Finally, at the teacher's request, Maria José goes to the blackboard to make the vowels. She takes a chalk stone and writes: a 1 1. Then: A to 1 u. And she stands in front of the board for some time. "Now I want you to do it without looking," the teacher asks impatiently, coming to the board. A lady named Maria José writes: 1. "— No, that's not letter "e". You've already done them today." "— Then let me see..." - and quickly goes back to his desk and starts to open his notebook. "— No! You're not supposed to look!" - the teacher intervenes, forbidding her. Mrs. Maria José stands still, static, in front of her desk, with her hand on her notebook, for a moment, not knowing what to do.

The teacher, faced with this situation, seems embarrassed. She remains silent for a moment, observing the student in her static position. "— She knows how to do it, she does everything right, but she can't remember" - she tells me, then, explaining Maria José's failure. The teacher also, it seems, shows disappointment. "I'm going to give you some homework to do," she says, speaking to Mrs. Maria José, who is still standing with a dejected, saddened expression. "— If I forget, I'll look in the notebook..." - she mutters. "— Look at her, if she forgets she looks in the notebook!" - comments teacher, to me, smiling. Mrs. Maria José smiles too. She couldn't write the vowels on the board. Especially her, who has been practicing incessantly in every class, copying vowels in her notebook, over the course of a semester! "— I'll copy it for you" - says the teacher. "— If you copy it I will love it" - replies, with a smile. "— Look, just teacher, she says if I copy it, she will love it" - says the teacher, addressing me. They both smile.

The teacher goes to the board and writes the vowels: a and i or u. The letters appear on the board, nervous and trembling. She's on the fifth line, now alone, writing: u, a, e, u, a, o, o, out of order. The teacher answers another student on the board and turns again to Mrs. Maria Jose: "— What letter is that?" - asks "— i" - she answers. "— No, the 'i' is the one with the little dot." The teacher then teaches D. Maria José to write the 'i', which she then repeats, followed by 'is': i, i, i, i, e.

<sup>5</sup> Buscamos palavras / que possam contar / de nossos ofícios.  
Mas todas, embora / do fundo brotadas, / resvalam, deslizam  
por sobre a camada / de tempo e distância



The teacher gives her directions again, and then says, "I'm going to give you a little lesson so you can practice a little easier at home. The teacher finally, apparently, gave up. She seemed very impatient and disappointed with the student's performance. She preferred to end the activity by resorting to the usual pillar of this literacy practice that I have been observing: the blind, uninterrupted training of the elements of writing. For Maria José, this has proven to be fruitless and inconsequential.

The lady named Maria José is not the only one, however, to present difficulties. Many other students do not know, and this affects the teacher deeply. I see disappointment on her face. Sitting two desks away from me, in the center of the room, from where she leads the students to the blackboard, I feel her anguish: she is impatient, her expressions show frustration, disappointment. Her face, always cheerful, today looks tired, a little more flushed than usual; the contractions crease her face. Her attitudes with the students, always cheerful, always smiling, always complacent with the jokes of some teenagers, today are affected by a certain feeling of helplessness, of seeing her work fall apart.

Some have difficulty even writing the vowels and consonants, and this destabilizes her. She gets impatient with the students who go to the blackboard. I notice her effort to remain calm, to not explode. Her commands to the students, however, are forced, full of irritation; an irritation that I see on her face, in her physiognomy, that she tries not to transfer to words, but the emotion escapes her.

I think that my presence in the classroom makes her situation even more difficult and embarrassing: the students, on the board, are showing that they have not learned the minimum that she intends to teach, which are the 'little letters'. "Those who are going to pass to the third grade can no longer have doubts about the letters", she tells me at the beginning of the class.

My presence disturbs her, I can feel it. With me, in the classroom, she needs to contain herself, to keep calm. She can't explode openly, it seems. She tries to hide her irritation, when she addresses the students, but her intonation lets on how dissatisfied she is with their performance. "— No, Alex!!!".—" Benedict! What did you really write there?!!!". The cognition and presence of the other mediates the emotional control of discontent in which the teacher feels at that moment. Emotions are constrained and modulated by the contributions of culture and social relations.

Months followed months of so many exercises, of copies and copies to which she subjected her students, of practicing the 'little letters'. "— As I tell them. Of course, I'll be patient, if they haven't learned in six months, we'll go on all over again" - she tells me, as if trying to explain the failure of her students' learning.

For the teacher, learning is presented as repetition, memorization of letters and words, and time is not a problem. Young people and adults who are behind in their learning, and who, for this reason, are in a hurry, eager, wishing and needing to learn, and fast. They don't have much time, because the world of work has already snatched them away or is attracting them with strength and determination: poor, they cannot do without work. This dimension is not inscribed in the teacher's perception. She does not question, at any time, her teaching method, and that perhaps it is not only a matter of time. But how to question?

She would need parameters to make such questions, other conceptions of literacy than the one she practices in the classroom: the training of empty letters, day after day. This is her method, this is her way, her learning to be a teacher; this is how she was formed historically, in the formal learning, in the teaching course, in the work relations. She cannot deny her subjectivity. She is not some kind of actor who created her own script. Her subjectivity forged and is forged historically and is an aggregate of social relations (Vygotsky, 2000c).

She cannot, she cannot, throw out the window what is most dear to her: the mastery of a know-how, of a discourse that gives shape, security and stability to her being a teacher, because such discourses (techniques and practices) are socially constituted and whose episteme instates certain forms of social relations.

"— Are you going to my classroom today?" - she asked me, one day, as we were heading to the rooms. "— No, I'm going to Iracy's room. "Today of all days I needed to ask you a few questions. You know that today the supervisor of my school [supervisor of day care centers] came up to me and asked: 'what is your method? Look at that! They never told us anything, never explained anything and now they come to ask us what method we use? I said that my method is 'learning through play' because they are small children... two years old... I would like you to tell me who is the most important author today. I studied Fröebel, Piaget, Vygotsky, but these things change, I wanted to know.

Thus, we are facing a practice that, historically and socially, gives visibility to "[...] the way men [teachers, students] determined under determined conditions create the means and forms of their social existence, reproduce or transform this social existence that is economic, political and cultural" (Chauí, 1981, p. 20).

In the relationship, the teacher suffers, gets distressed. She falls in the webs of the effects of meaning that mediation provokes. The teacher is a responsible professional, concerned, aware and conscious of what she must do to teach the letters. She does not neglect. She watches over her students. The monitoring, the training, the reading of the letters - this is what she knows how to do and what she does with care, certainty, and faith. She doesn't realize that there are other possibilities for her students to relate to writing. For her, the only possible path is training. These readings are made possible by the marks left by her enunciations and by her practice. In these marks, the teacher sees herself in her singularity. "Singularity and meaning are inscribed in the gestures and postures of individuals, leaving marks on their bodies. They are intertwined with their words and silences, and leave traces in their words" (Fontana, 2000, p. 105).

If the gaze gives visibility to the affective-emotional manifestations of the lady named Maria José in her arduous relationship with writing and reading, one cannot fail to give visibility, also, to the affective-emotional manifestations of the teacher in her relationship with her students, signified in her verbal and nonverbal enunciations. The events in the classroom touch and affect the teacher in her subjectivity: she suffers and anguishes. Feeling of failure for not seeing her goals achieved. The students in front of her, making mistakes, more mistakes than successes, are the materialization of failure, not only of the student, of learning, but of teaching: it is as if the world were collapsing on her shoulders, a heavy burden she carries. She falls, alone, in her anguish. She also experiences loneliness, just like Dona Maria José, in her moments of training.

The teacher reverberates on herself the effects of the meanings of a pedagogical practice that constituted her, that she did not create, but that she appropriated without the benefit of an inventory, as Gramsci (1978) says. She does not make herself immune in her teaching relations with her students. Both affect each other and are affected. Events of joy, sadness, anguish, and jubilation are not exclusive attributes of one or the other, in a dichotomous and Manichean game. They are evidence of the conditions of production of the intersubjective relationships experienced in the classroom, with knowledge as a fundamental mediator.

### Digressions 1

The presence, in the classroom, of the lady named Maria José, a woman, poor, black, illiterate and in her longevity, evidence forms of oppression that the old, in their social condition of economically unproductive, face, among which, the submission to a life of silence and estrangement. In modern capitalist society, the biological decrepitude of men and women unashamedly and unceremoniously signals the ultimate end of their social position: abandonment and banishment from social and cultural life, especially for those without possessions. Therefore, everyone should face, without any illusions, an inexorable destiny, made of uncertainties and exclusions, in its various forms and shades, in its subtleties and trivialized cruelties.

To the poorest and to the very poor, old age shows itself in its greatest harshness, as segregation and oblivion. Without the possession of material goods, as defining social positions, how will they survive? In many cases - and for the most part - with only the few proceeds of an indigent retirement, if any. This is when they no longer have the strength and muscle power to supplement their income with some form of precarious work.

Old age is forgotten and isolated in deliberate places: in the solitude of homes or in the common life, but equally lonely, of nursing homes, either those that are paid for or those maintained by public social assistance or by some benevolent institution. In society, the irresolute destiny of 'being' old is to live or, as Chauí says, "[...] to survive without a project, prevented from remembering and teaching, suffering the adversities of a body that disintegrates as memory becomes more and more alive, old age, which does not exist for itself, but only for the other, the oppressor" (Bosi, 1983, p. XVIII).

Excluded and oppressed, the old are prevented from speaking out, from communicating what they have learned in the long years of life and work, simply because no one wants them or has time to listen to them, busy as they are in meeting the swift demands of the volatile order of capital. Experience, as knowledge that has been developed over time, is already worthless in this order. This is the reason why Benjamin (1987) laments the death of narrative, through which the accumulated wisdom of individuals was shared. In a society instituted by processes that value what is disposable, in haste and speed, listening, the intersubjective relationship of sharing and exchanging experiences, no longer finds a recognized place. Forgotten and pushed to the margins of productive processes, the elderly have no one to talk to, no one who can listen to them, who can give them 'advice'. Benjamin (1987) laments this loss of the ability to give 'advice' and sees this as an inescapable path towards the simplification of human experience and life.

## Digressions 2

It is in the plural relationship that we learn, understand the world, and constitute ourselves in our singularities. How to discover senses and meanings in a fragmentary learning, of a literacy that denies the adventure of knowing, of getting involved with cultural contents? Snyders (2001), in his work, *Happy Students*, presents emotion - joy - at school, not as something fortuitous, but as arising from relations with knowledge in which students face situations that imply difficulties, dedication and hard work. Learning, which is not solely pleasurable, must presuppose joy as the fruit of difficulties overcome.

For Charlot (2000), learning, in turn, is to appropriate this world, to enter a relationship with other subjects, meanings, values, artifacts, etc. In this process of inter-relationship, the subject builds himself, always mediated by the other, always with the help of others and, thus, he gives meaning and meaning to the relationships for the benefit of his own singularization. In other words, this uninterrupted movement in which we construct and are constructed by others is what we broadly call education. "I can only educate myself in an exchange with others, with the world" (Charlot, 2000, p. 54).

For this author, meaning is that which produces intelligibility about something, that which helps us understand the world; that which can be communicable and, therefore, can be understood in an exchange with others. Meaning is thus produced in interrelationships with other partners, within a system. To learn, therefore, is to appropriate meanings and senses that, in some way, mobilize us, impelling us to act. The subject wants to learn because he wants to appropriate a world that is essentially human and, therefore, always desirable (Charlot, 2000).

What, then, to expect, in the face of the knowledge practices - reading and writing - described, which were experienced by the student, Mrs. Maria José? A world of senses and meanings, of cognitive and affective cultural objects seem to be denied to them by a mechanical and sterile literacy practice.

## Concluding remarks

The affective manifestations, whether of acceptance or denial, go through subjects in intersubjective relationships and acquire visibility in teaching, learning, and knowledge appropriation relationships, radically affecting the demands to the subjects' cognitive development and their subjective stability.

Reflecting on the empirical, we consider that the evidence seems to indicate that one cannot think the emotional and affective issue, in the pedagogical practice, disconnected from the success in learning, a condition for cognitive development and other dimensions of psychic life. Thus, it is necessary, when examining pedagogical relations, to pay attention to the issue of inseparability between emotion-affectivity-schooling knowledge and cognitive development. Emotion-affectivity-knowledge-cognition is part of an inseparable psychic and subjective dimension.

The narrative shows evidence of an effort to teach, but, at the same time, it shows that there was not the expected learning of what was proposed each day of class. Therefore, it seems that the school did not accomplish what was expected of it, to promote cognitive/intellectual development. Experiencing a mechanical, repetitive learning practice, based on the mere drawing, redesigning, and copying letters and numbers, it was up to our character, as a student, to experience emotions of anguish, suffering and sadness.

The analysis seems to show that it is knowledge that modulates pedagogical relations in the classroom. The failure to apprehend and learn the knowledge (syllabus), in the specific case of this narrative, reading and writing, provoked emotional and affective expressions that were indicated in random and instinctive body gestures, for example, randomly waving the body to one side or the other; languid states; lips that moved incessantly; vague, lost looks; physiognomy evidencing states of displeasure, sadness. Thus, the feeling of not learning immobilizes the affective-cognitive investments for new learning, for the appropriation of new knowledge.

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#### NOTE:

The author, Raimundo Nonato de Oliveira Falabelo, was responsible for the conception, analysis, and interpretation of the data; writing and critical revision of the manuscript content; and also, approval of the final version to be published.