Talking circle and student assembly: for a culture of peace in a school community*[1]

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Abstract

Part of a doctoral study[5], this article examines the process of school conflicts driven by territorial forces, as well as the effort to implement democratic coexistence for a culture of peace by means of assemblies as devices in a school that is recognized for promoting democratic education. Social cartography, including cartographic ethos and hints, is the method guiding the work. The inhabited research territory is part of a peripheral community situated at the boundary of a Brazilian state capital, within an area that forms a conurbation with a favela in another municipality. The school is public and part of the municipal education system of this capital. The teacher responsible for the class has been with it for two years and was observed engaging in territorializing practices that foster a culture of listening and respect for all forms of life among the children most of the time. We found that while the children were unrestrained—whether by the presence of the teacher or other school staff, such as coordinators and principals—some conflicts were recurrent, culminating in physical aggression. This school community uses assemblies as an institutionalized device in daily life, stimulated by the talking circles that are monthly held. One of these occasions was analyzed cartographically, which involved reflecting on how the democratic coexistence has been guided by the way this school community members coexist and interact with each other. The participation of two students from the fifth grade of basic education in a field work out of the school, at the Inhotim Institute, was in the assembly agenda and was discussed considering the literature on school violence and democratic coexistence, within a culture of peace.

***** English version by Fernando Effori de Melo.

1- Data availability: The data set that supports the results of this study are publicly available on SciELO Data and can be accessed at https://data.scielo.org/privateurl.xhtml?token=a7d561dd-865f-4f9d-870a-f154104a4ca2

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5- The study was funded by a doctoral student scholarship granted through the Support Program for Graduate Students out the State of Amazonas (POSGFE) from the Amazonas State Research Foundation (FAPEAM).

https://doi.org/10.1590/S1678-4634202551281711en

Keywords

Democratic schools – Conflicts – Culture of peace – Democratic coexistence – Assemblies.

Introduction

During my residence period in the territory selected to be studied over the course of a doctoral work, one episode in particular, among so many, caused my attention as a cartographer to make a "mid-flight landing:" An assembly to discuss the behavior of the "blue class,"[6] the recurring conflicts between it and the "green class" and, curiously, whether or not Pérola[7] would go to the art museum at the Inhotim-MG Institute. This article, one of the lived experiences of the thesis, results from the researchers' experiences in one of the school communities that form the experiential territory of the research, which focuses on democratic schools and interculturality. Given the initial purposes of the study, the examined school is a public institution belonging to the municipal school system of a Brazilian state capital. It is also one of the democratic institutions recognized by the World Transformative Schools Program (a program of Ashoka, in partnership with the Alana Institute, created in 2015), the Innovation and Creativity in Basic Education initiative (MEC, 2005), and Schools2030. Additionally, it is included on the map of the Innovation Movement in Education (organized by Singer, Cidade Escola Aprendiz, and Ashoka).

The researched school belongs to the municipal public system and is located in a community territory primarily composed of low-income families with informal jobs. The school's pedagogical political project indicates that the families are predominantly headed by women who are or were single mothers. The school occupies a central place in the community, both geographically and socially, and is seen as "the heart of the community," as various activities revolve around it, including community member meetings, social assistance programs, and groups working on housing regularization. The community leader reports that the school has previously served as a shelter during a house collapse and even as a venue for a funeral. The school embraces this view of the community and reciprocates its affection by maintaining a close relationship with its surroundings. Examples include actions organized in the community square, such as the adoption of a water spring, June festivities, a sustainable fashion show, and the Network for Peace initiative aimed at reducing violence. It is physically well-structured and accommodates students with special needs through accessible facilities. Another notable feature is the availability of functional electronic equipment in sufficient quantities to meet students' needs, including tablets and Chromebooks.

From the definitions found in the literature on democratic schools, we highlight two common characteristics related to the genesis of such institutions: (1) Democratic processes that shape school life through management practices promoting the participation

6- These are two fifth-grade classes of Brazilian basic education.
7- All the names of people that appear in the study are fictitious.

of the school community in decision-making and assemblies; and (2) a democratic and flexible curriculum, characterized by the absence of compulsory curriculums and the adoption of flexibilization based on centers of interest (Singer, 2008). Students are free to organize their own routines, following individual and unique paths. Educational practices that encourage individuals to pursue different paths, based on centers of interest and considering identities and desires, should not be seen as individualizing; instead, they may be understood as prioritizing difference and desire. Similarly, collective education should not be mistaken for a standardizing practice. Addressing personal learning needs allows groups to self-organize and enables individuals to learn and connect from diverse perspectives (Singer, 2010; Apple & Beane, 2001; Almeida, 2014). In summary, the definition of democratic schools we envision involves those that aim to make the organization of time, space, and school knowledge more flexible, moving in a direction that is the opposite of the mass education system, which emphasizes serialization and homogeneity and is the historical product of a specific era.

In this context, we rely on the method of social cartography to guide observation, participation, and analysis—a process that creates its path by walking, contrasting with representational research that prioritizes forms, while we focus on forces. We chose to examine phenomena and episodes through the lens of the philosophy of difference, which values minimal and marginal desires and existences over identity. The intercessors referenced include Deleuze, Guattari, Kastrup, Passos, Tedesco, and Escossia.

Returning to the characterization of our chosen territory, democratic or alternative schools generally operate within the principles of justice, equity, freedom, and participation, while emphasizing values such as solidarity, cooperation, tolerance, group spirit, self-regulation, and dialogue (Puig, 2000). In contrast to traditional serial education, which is structured around exams, disciplines, lecture-based classes, and a rigid, prescriptive curriculum, these schools create territories where students become the center of their educational trajectories. Learning occurs through projects, investigations, self-assessments, educational pathways, and regulatory assemblies. Personal development is tied to respecting and engaging in dialogue with difference and freedom of expression. Educators and students share responsibilities for what is meaningful to them, moving beyond authoritarian and moralizing behaviors.

Singer, one of the authors referenced as intercessors in this work, has used the term "innovative schools,"[8] as has Moran. Avellar (2019), during an interview, questioned the author about the reason for changing the term. While we understand that this change seeks to expand the doing of a school other—a category that includes integral, inclusive, transformative, and democratic schools—we believe it is essential to resist the neoliberal mercantilist ideal, so prevalent in the pursuit of "technological innovation." We recognize

8- In an interview, Helena Singer was asked why she has been using the term "innovative" while abandoning the qualifier "democratic." Her answer was: "calling it innovative is because today—and this hasn't always been this way—but today, with the technological revolution, people desire innovation. Teachers desire it, students desire it, parents desire it. And we want to speak to everyone's desire. We don't want to address a small network, who are feeding each other. We want this to be possible for everyone. And for parents everywhere in the world to have the option of choosing a school like this—or not—for their children. We want this to be accessible to all. So, you have to speak to people's desire. And their desire is not for democratic school or transformative school or inclusive school. It's for innovation. So, we are using the term that is what people desire" (Avellar, 2019, p. 93-94).

the need to develop public policies and widely disseminate knowledge about the creation of these "other schools," but we place our trust in the public sphere, which can hack the educational system by resisting a diminished model of education. Therefore, we will retain the expression "democratic" rather than "innovative," while acknowledging that the integration of innovative technologies is an inherent part of the educational process in 2023.

We emphasize that only the use of current technologies, as has been carried out since the pandemic period through cybertechnologies, does not guarantee that there is technological innovation. Moreover, the use of technologies does not imply universal access to them. We can refer to Feenberg (2017), who examines the social role of technologies from a critical theory perspective, arguing that not everyone has access to them and that this disparity can exacerbate inequalities, creating the illusion of progress through technological advances. The author says that when cybertechnologies are deployed by conformist structures, they do not necessarily improve the teaching process or contribute to human development in social and creative dimensions. Instead, they remain indifferent to context, masked by the alibi of instrumentalism that claims false neutrality.

Considering the current situation, technologies in education present themselves as one possible alternative, provided that peers reflect and develop strategies during the process that include the desire to create tools supporting human interaction. However, their mere use does not inherently determine—despite their potential—the excellence of teaching as a guaranteed outcome. On the contrary, they risk becoming automated and devoid of formative meaning. We cannot overlook the fact that technology is an element of power in our society; it is not politically neutral and can perpetuate the status quo, control, and social domination, depending on how it is used. School spaces are increasingly technical environments, but without a critical political-pedagogical framework, adaptation can become harmful, potentially leading to an unattainable democracy and undermining essential elements of humanization in school life (Sampaio Junior, 2022).

From the literature review conducted during this research, we identified that most studies resided in the territory for a relatively short period, such as a week, two days, or even just two class hours. To map school practices and the community being experienced, we consider an extended period of residence to be beneficial, particularly given our reliance on social cartography. Thus, the initial proposal was to reside in the territory for three weeks. However, during the days of data composition—in the act of co-doing (*fazerCOM*)—we found it necessary to extend the period. There were still events that caught my attention and made me believe the presence of the researcher-cartographer was still required, given the relationships established with community actors, the proximity of the end of the school year, and, cartographically, the attention hint, which was still "landing in mid-flight," attuned to flows and forces.

Thus, we remained throughout the entire month of November, following the school's daily life until the end of the 2022 school year. During this period, I experienced my own self-recalcitrance, believing that there was still more to observe and experience, as well as the self-recalcitrance of the participants, denying some things I had proposed (to myself), while (re)discovering others. I was present at pedagogical and communication meetings,

classrooms, activities proposed by the Integrated School Program (PEI),[9] external visits, the school anniversary, the English festival, commemorative weeks, meetings of the Board of Social Work, restorative circles, etc. This research aims to understand forces rather than forms, hence the "being and making oneself subject," characterizing a procedural type of research in which the co-engendering of the world and the researcher themselves occurs through the progressively investigated practices. In this type of research, it is important to affirm that establishing causal relationships is not possible; instead, the focus is on connections and joints. The idea of procedurality is a radical proposition, but it is the one we choose to pursue.

For the notion of territory in a study guided by the method of social cartography, it is necessary to consider the political dimension, which extends beyond the traditional conception of land demarcation or the boundaries of a particular political-administrative jurisdiction. Understanding a territory from a political perspective involves considering space-power. The construction of territory is tied to power relations, while its spatial manifestation occurs through social interactions. Territory implies acknowledging its heterogeneity and its transscalar nature, meaning that agencies are produced and reproduced through unequal, contradictory, and conflicting movements that are never neutral.

In seeking to understand our becoming-being within a spatial territory, we are crossed by the dynamism of procedurality. The actors, acting in networks, perform the territorialization of space, enabling the emergence of new territories (T - territorialization) and their disappearance (D - deterritorialization) through the appearance of an exit vector, or their reconstruction (R - reterritorialization), in a process known as T-D-R (Raffestin, 1993). The very concept of territory is an assemblage; it is a broader notion than those of form, limit, structure, system, or assembly. An assemblage includes heterogeneous elements that are simultaneously biological and social, machinic, gnoseological, and imaginary (Guattari; Rolnik, 2010). It is from this perspective that we introduce the idea that education takes place in the territory, through territorialities. It is in the territory that an effective political project of liberation—of desires, bodies, creation, the production of subjectivity, and art—takes place (Haesbaert; Bruce, 2002).

Social cartography involves a set of procedures, referred to as the cartographic ethos, which are established or constituted by what we call hints. These hints replace the concept of rules. It is an inventive production of knowledge construction, not merely a method for solving problems or representing ideas. The method—or hodós-metà—carries an invented and inventive nature, since we believe the path is created in the act of walking, as opposed to the notion of a pre-defined path to follow, governed by fixed rules and procedures. These are the hint of trust between the agents and the researcher, manifesting in the ethos of the research itself, and the hint that all research is intervention, acknowledging that how one interviews or accesses discourses can influence the way the subject expresses what they have to say. Therefore, research does not occur in neutrality. The hints communicate, such as the act of residing in the field, the hint of the common, of trust, of researching WITH,[10] and, of course, with the attention described above. The

9- A project that engages with the knowledge, equipment, and services available in the community, such as workshops in popular crafts, *capoeira*, music, field trips, and remedial classes offered outside regular school hours.

10- The expression is used by the cartography method to emphasize the importance of all peers during the investigation process. The new spelling imbues potential in the strength of peers and the collective through living in society.

hints are not isolated; they are networked and dynamic. The research takes place through a collective of forces—therefore residing in a territory.

And it is this ethos that allows us to say that after a period of the researcher's residence in the territory, they leave it behind but do not destroy the territory they have left. There will be a recomposition of a territory engaged in a deterritorializing process. Abandonment does not occur because the research has come to an end or because the researcher has traversed the entire territory to its limit (if such a limit exists), but because even rhizomatic and non-hierarchical research requires the establishment of boundaries—both spatial and temporal—that delineate the extent to which phenomena capture the cartographer's attention.

The School Assembly Device

As mentioned, this article aims to understand the process of school conflicts and discuss the scenes of a school assembly, relating conflicts, violence, a culture of peace, and democratic coexistence. During my time residing in the territory, I spent most of it with the blue class, which, despite being very affectionate within and toward the community, had some conflicts that affected me, including incidents that culminated in physical aggression. The class was very disciplined in the teacher's presence, but when she was absent—whether at the entrance or exit of classes, in recess, or out of regular school hours, when some children were in the PEI—conflicts occasionally arose. Most of these were disagreements between the blue and green classes. On two or three occasions, I was in the room when the coordinator came to report to Ms. Kee, the teacher, about some contention that had occurred. The teacher, always calm, spoke with the students to first understand the reason for the conflict, then why they reacted with a "fight," and finally discussed how they could have avoided the situation without direct confrontation. Two students, Lara and Pérola, were at the center of most of the conflicts, both in initiating and escalating the situations, which ultimately culminated in aggression. In one such incident, Lara kicked a student from the green class, and Pérola uttered several swear words, which led to the scheduling of a talking circle with the school assembly.

In interviews with Ms. Kee, she revealed that both students struggled to adhere to agreed-upon arrangements and basic social coexistence rules, such as refraining from attacking their peers. One of the conflict resolution devices already embedded in the culture of the school community is the talking circle: a dialogical method in which participants sit together in a circle with a mediator, and the issue is addressed through questions designed to provoke reflection. Another device is the school assembly. These take place after the talking circles and have a more formal character, such as being documented in meeting minutes. Through voting, students decide on matters related to arrangements, (re)formulate coexistence rules or agreements for planned actions, determine penalties, and share needs among peers. The school also uses other instruments to address conflicts and indiscipline: meetings with families, as well as meetings with the Child Protection Council, Social Work Referral Center (CRAS), Regional Education Office, and other agencies within the

Child, Adolescent, and Adult Protection Network. The school recognizes the importance of networking.[11]

Kee also reported that affective-behavioral interventions with Lara and Pérola had been carried out on what she herself referred to as four fronts: (a) meetings with the families (teacher, representative of the school coordination, representative of the family, and the pre-adolescent); (b) talking circles with the class (one of which fell within the profile of what the school assembly addresses and is described in this text); (c) private conversations between the students and the teacher; and (d) a meeting with the green class to address recurring conflicts between the two large groups. However, even after these interventions, some conflicts persisted, led by both girls, prompting an assembly to be scheduled.

After Pérola uttered several swear words and Lara kicked a green class student, Kee decided to call an assembly, preceded by a talking circle. The objective of this assembly was to address the current behavior of the blue class, the recurrent aggressions out of the classroom, and strategies for overcoming the reported difficulties. In light of the specific and conflicting behavior of the two students mentioned, Kee also decided that one of the points to be resolved in the assembly would be whether Pérola and Lara could accompany the class on an external field trip that was already scheduled.

The school's General Pedagogical Coordinator (CPG) was invited to mediate these proceedings, as she had been present during the last two talking circles and was closely monitoring the conflicts in this class. Moments before the conversation began, a beetle died in the classroom. The children, accustomed to respecting and caring for animals—a value instilled by Kee—suggested to the teacher: "Shall we hold a burial for the beetle?" The teacher asked the class if they agreed, and together they decided to make a coffin for the animal, as well as a wreath and a pit for its burial. They go to the school garden, and during the procession, Lara says to Pérola, "You could have died along with the beetle." Pérola retorts, "Well, let me pop home and get a shovel to bury you, then." Kee intervenes, noting that the comment was not nice, even if meant as a joke. She reports the incident to the CPG, who opens the talking circle with this event. The topic of life and death intersected with this school community at several points, including with a murder that occurred at the school gate on graduation day [an episode described in the thesis]. Once again, the theme was present at the start of the talking circle and assembly, mediated by the CPG, who said:

> "In a moment, you'll be buried right there next to the beetle, too." Look how the beetle topic, which was something really nice, suddenly turns into a joke that no longer shows compassion for a human being or another living being. The whole beetle thing was beautiful because it showed real compassion for another living being that was not even human. When someone says that her classmate will be buried with the beetle, that's cruelty and meanness. And the classmate says she'll help by bringing a shovel from home? Is that a joke? It is. But do you know what happens?

11- The Network is woven by various agencies that analyze the situation of the child, adolescent, or adult—since this school also offers youth and adult education programs—to provide support for them and their families. Cases identified as genuinely requiring network support are referred to these bodies.

> When you hear jokes like that, you tend to naturalize what isn't natural. Here, in this context, we have an opportunity to reflect a little on our behavior. We do make mistakes—that age you're in is the age of goofing off. You want to make fun of everything, you want to joke about everything, right? That's normal. I've been your age too. But everything has its limits, you know? If it's crossing the line, it's better to stop, right? When you start offending or messing with someone to get back at them, it's time to hold back—that's not okay. Having compassion for the little beetle is such a beautiful thing, but that joke about your classmate, that's not nice at all. I've seen this a lot in our society. (Talking circle recording, November 2022).

The CPG reminded the group of the rules of the talking circle, particularly regarding the speech object that marks each person's turn to speak and the dialogue's starting point: the end of the previous talking circle.

> Shall we have a round, picking up from there? The school, and then it's them. [...] The important thing is that we're here to listen to each other carefully and to talk responsibly. Okay? So, let's restart our round from where we stopped last time, when we were talking about how to make your classroom environment more pleasant, right? You spoke of what was good and what was bad. Then we were going to talk now of what the school can do to help the classroom environment be cool, and what you can do. (Talking circle recording, November 2022).

The children were to resume the topic of the last talking circle. On the floor, there were four posters surrounding a carpet that marked the center of the circle. Each poster read: RESPECT / LISTENING / RESPONSIBILITY / COMMITMENT.

Amid the discussions in the talking circle, two themes emerged: a) The fact that the blue class had been without physical education classes for six weeks for various reasons, such as holidays, previously scheduled events coinciding with the weekly physical education class, external evaluations, and a teachers' strike, leading to significant dissatisfaction among the children; (b) and the punishment banning recess for the entire class due to fights between the blue and green classes. Some children requested a deeper investigation into the conflict between the classes and suggested that one of the coordinators restrict recess as a punishment only for those involved in the conflict, rather than for everyone.

The reflection of conflicts

Here I pause the text to add strength to the topic of conflicts. Here, I pause the text to emphasize the topic of conflicts. In line with the intercessors of this study—Biondi (2008), Leme (2006), Lemann Foundation (2018), Zechi (2014), Garcia (2009), Aquino (2011), Abramovay (2016), Moricone and Bélanger (2015)—we consider conflicts to be common in the school environment and to hold potential for the learning of democracy. We can think, from the perspective of Telma Vinha and collaborators (2019), that the way educators deal with conflicts can serve as an opportunity to teach how to solve them in a preventive way. We believe that conflicts provide good conditions, depending on what we do and how we deal with them, to foster a culture of peace, dialogue, and coexistence

based on democracy. Educators can mediate conflicts with the aim of helping those involved reflect on their behavior, coordinate different perspectives, increase tolerance, and engage in dialogue with those who hold contrary opinions.

It is indisputable that we are living in an era of conflict as humanity. There is violence, which we might even describe as epidemic, permeating society and schools. Although it may seem repetitive to discuss this, we believe that a society speaks of what it needs, as the Stoic philosophers pointed out. In other words, if discussing violence and conflicts seems repetitive, perhaps this indicates that we are in need of precisely what we are addressing—or its resolution. Ullrich and Rocha (2019) claim that our society is intimacy-driven and guided by the code of narcissism; it is as if private issues lose their boundaries and overshadow the purposes of the public world.

Most of the problems in school coexistence, according to Leme (2009), involve verbal and/or veiled aggressions, thefts, and damage to personal belongings. Szadkoski (2010) also states that disorder, riots, offensive words, insolence, and indelicacy are far more common than violence that actually breaks the law. Incivility refers to minor violations of the established order—behaviors that contradict the rules of good coexistence. These acts hurt because they lack politeness and disregard the code of good manners (Garcia; Tognetta; Vinha, 2013). Transgression means breaking the school's rules—failing to comply, violating, trespassing, or trampling on them. Violence, in contrast, involves delinquent acts.

A specific type of violence is conflicts, which can serve as a valuable space for exercising and learning democracy, as said earlier. It is these conflicts, or rather their mediation, that we believe hold potential as an arena for implementing a culture of peace and democratic coexistence.

Violence in schools has been, and continues to be, recognized by teachers as well as by the students themselves. Approximately 70% of students believe that violence has occurred in the school they attend. Cyberbullying, threats, robbery, and theft are among the most recurrent forms. Most young people do not turn to teachers or school administrators for help in resolving these issues—only 42% do so (Abramovay, 2016). They only do so if they consider the adult trustworthy and believe that the resolution will be fair and effective without further aggravating the problem. The school should be a place of protection.

It is not enough for students to refrain from incivility or violence only within the school space or merely in the presence of a teacher. This is what coercive measures, containment, security, and punitive actions tend to promote. As reported: Sometimes Pérola refrained from acts of incivility or aggression in the presence of the reference teacher, Kee, but behaved differently at the entrance and exit of classes and during recess, when there was no adult supervision. Students should learn to handle conflicts assertively and respectfully, using dialogue to foster democratic coexistence as a driving force that embraces differences and promotes living with tolerance[12] and empathy. Students must learn to interact in various situations, considering both their own perspective and that

12- The concept of tolerance is a complex and controversial idea, recently debated and perhaps undergoing a reconstruction of its meaning.

of others, and finding ways to coordinate them. They must understand the consequences of their actions and evaluate them to self-regulate their behavior, regardless of external agents, whether inspectors or rules with enforced consequences.

One point to emphasize is that the teacher in charge of the blue class did not view conflicts through the traditional lens, which tends to ignore them when they are considered "minor" or "age-typical play," or to address them only when they involve students and educators—revealing a prioritization of values that apply solely to power asymmetries, implying that only authorities deserve respect and justice. The teacher consistently emphasized, both in words and actions, that every form of life deserves respect (as exemplified by the beetle's funeral and burial, along with several other episodes involving animals). She did not aim to resolve conflicts merely because they disrupted the "order" of the class or interfered with the development of content, but primarily because such conflicts are detrimental to the development of children in education. This reflects an exceptional approach aligned with what is advocated by prominent researchers of conflicts and democratic coexistence. Kee territorializes in such a way that students come to understand the importance of respect, coordination of perspectives and feelings, and dialogue in peer relationships. The issue lies not only in the children's actions and the internalization of these behaviors, but also in the disruption of the established order.

On the assembly day, life & death

Returning to the trip to Inhotim, the external fieldwork previously mentioned, an item on the assembly agenda and a trigger for calling the talking circle: there was an intersection of content from arts, mathematics, and literature for the blue class. The visit was part of this interdisciplinarity: it combined the arts discipline—viewed by the class as relevant and something that permeates life—with environmental education, which these students practiced regularly. They had a habit of caring for the environment, throwing garbage in the bin, and avoiding harm to animals, and their teacher consistently reinforced it. This fieldwork would be evaluated in the arts discipline, through accounts made after the visit. It would also be evaluated in literature using the same written instrument, as well as in the environment sciences discipline by the second teacher of the class—the support teacher—who also became involved in the work. Thus, missing the opportunity to visit Inhotim would have been very harmful to any student. More than a matter of grades, it represented a unique moment for those children who, due to their socioeconomic conditions, were often deprived of experiences of this kind.

However, just a few days earlier, there had been serious incidents of indiscipline that the school could not tolerate—physical aggression against peers. Pérola had repeatedly kicked a classmate from the green class, and Lara had struck another peer with her backpack. In such cases, the school could summon families and, to avoid canceling the fieldwork, suggest that they accompany their children. For students whose families were unwilling to accompany them, the common understanding and the buzz among classmates was: "So-and-so isn't going on the tour." This buzz would spread through the school hallways, like a game of telephone, and before anyone knew it, the story had already become distorted.

Measures needed to be taken immediately to prevent these twisted stories from spreading. Ms. Kee turned to the school CPG and requested a talking circle with the class about their trip to Inhotim. The day was scheduled, and the first circle was held. The class had much to discuss regarding various inappropriate behaviors, and some improvements were made. The time for that meeting ran out, and the agenda concerning Inhotim was postponed to the next talking circle, which they had also scheduled.

The next day, the talking circle resumed with a second meeting. On this day, it was agreed that the main agenda would be Inhotim, as the trip was approaching, and that the circle would serve as a student deliberation assembly, where the students would vote on whether Pérola and Lara could participate in the fieldwork. However, before voting, they were given the opportunity to explain themselves. The other attendees were also heard and shared their positions on the matter. And so it was done. The attendees spoke at length, explained themselves, and the vote took place: it was unanimous in favor of allowing Lara to go, and nearly unanimous for Pérola as well. The assembly's decision was duly respected. The family authorization forms were distributed to the students, who later returned them signed, and the entire class, without a single absence, participated in the fieldwork. The day in Inhotim was deeply rewarding for everyone. After two years of the pandemic, they were finally able to leave for the first time and visit such a meaningful place, where art and nature together proclaim so beautifully: it is possible for culture and the environment to coexist in harmony without offending each other!

Kee initially brought up a few points with Pérola to bring the conflict back to mind, giving her the opportunity to build the discourse herself: "What did you do?" "Why did you do it?" "What was your purpose?" "Whom did you benefit?" "Whom did you harm?" "What will the consequences of your actions be?" After reflecting on these questions, they were able to discuss other situations and simulate alternative outcomes, but these issues needed to be addressed first. Amid long faces, frowns, sweat, and tears, they spoke about the motives behind the acts of aggression and their surroundings.

During the talking circle, the CPG said:

> You're making your own life harder. Do you think a little conflict, this little bickering, isn't already messing with your life? It is! Think, guys! Wider, this is how you're looking at things, you're like... [imitating horse blinders]. Expand your world, let's see it differently, let's negotiate. Okay? That's coexistence! Let me make one last point here, which is the conflict between the classes that's resounding down there in the lack of recess. That's another point that for me, oh... really tough! Going without recess is tough! I think it's the most punish-y punishment on the face of the Earth! There's no such word, I've just made it up! Because you do it all waiting for recess. And there's people who do nothing, also waiting for recess, and that's not fair, is it? It's not fair! And then you have to start thinking of alternatives. Instead of going without recess, how about doing something else? C'mon... Oh, miss, can we go on recess? We're doing this research on the values we need to develop in this class, you know... let's do a research on empathy, a research on something else. (Talking circle recording, November 2022).

In her contribution, the coordinator tried to demonstrate to the children how conflicts were harming them, to the extent of losing recess and risking a reduction in coexistence opportunities within shared spaces, since one of the alternatives considered was to separate the classes to avoid new confrontations. Positively, the CPG and Kee share a perspective on conflicts that aligns with the literature we reference (Vinha; Nunes; Moro, 2019), which corroborates that conflicts exist and will continue to exist. It is necessary to know how to use conflicts to develop values such as tolerance and respect in coexistence, coexisting and interacting WITH others, thus fostering a culture of peace and enabling democratic coexistence.

It is important to note that the assembly took place at a time when the researcher was already integrated into the school community and accepted by the students as another peer. This connection between researcher and researched takes place on a plane of forces, so that the interviewee does not see me, the researcher-cartographer, as someone hierarchically superior to them. Instead, I seek to return to the subjects, questioning whether what they said was what they truly meant and whether they still have more to contribute or share. Another relevant hint in cartography is the hint of trust, which relates to the ethos of the research itself, as well as the idea that all research is an intervention—believing that handling how discourse is carried out can change the way the subject expresses what they have to say. Therefore, research does not occur in neutrality. The notion of belonging grows from the hint of trust, which is connected to the hint of the common, by which the authors connect and articulate.

Conflict mediation for a culture of peace

On several occasions, the disciplinary coordinator of the shift entered the classroom to call Pérola, among other students, for disciplinary intervention. At those moments, Kee inquired about what had happened, and the report was always very similar: "A fight during recess," or "a fight with a student from another class at the entrance," or even "a fight in the restroom." At such times, Kee's words were always something like: "I can't believe you did it again!" or "I don't believe it!" and the coordinator would comment: "It seems like they're one person in the classroom and another outside," or "It looks like Pérola has two personalities." These events were recurrent, as was the clarity of the facts. In the classroom, when a routine was established that focused on valuing the best in each individual by recognizing their potential and mediating small conflicts through dialogue, there was no room for aggression. Outside the classroom, without the presence of the mediator, there was room for disorganized conflicts, even leading to aggression, which reveals that democratic coexistence has not yet been fully achieved. However, we cannot say that the culture of peace is not being implemented. This is a long-term process, and coexistence projects need to be carried out, as D'Ambrosio illustrates when he says:

> To educate for peace is to educate for the survival of civilization on this planet, of humanity, and of the species—but for the survival of all with dignity. This is a crucial point: the dignity of the individual to be who they are, to adhere to a system of knowledge, and to understand their roots, historical and emotional relations, religion, and spirituality. (2012, p. 4). (2012, p. 4).

This does not happen overnight; it takes time, perseverance, and intentionality—what Kee and the school strive to achieve.

Here, it is worth highlighting one of Kee's interventions when the class's indiscipline exceeded acceptable boundaries, and she needed to take control of the situation. The blue class had several concomitant projects, one of which was the reading of literary books during recess, as mentioned earlier. On more than one occasion, the disciplinary coordinator of the shift ordered a ban on recess for the class, since some students had transgressed norms of coexistence. Kee intervened a few times, asserting that the class had the right to snack time, and the time allocated for "Reading in Recess" (one of the components of the "Protagonism and Reading" project of the golden class, a pedagogical project developed by the class and presented to parents and pedagogical coordinators). Thus, Kee designated a garden area where the class could read books after drinking water, using the bathroom, and having a snack during recess. The teacher's actions in defense of the class and advocating for them were visible throughout the school and were certainly perceived by the children as a sign of an adult who cares and can be trusted. This aligns with what the intercessory references regarding school climate and the culture of peace suggest, promoting a sense of security in students as a result. The security generated by this defense fosters an environment in the classroom that supports the development of healthy relationships. The literature emphasizes that "care for the quality of relations between peers and between teachers and students—that is, the treatment given by teachers to students, the way they deal with conflicts, as well as the types of sanctions they employ"—is significantly important for greater adherence to the value of democratic coexistence (Vinha; Nunes; Moro, 2019, p. 143).

Adults, and especially educators, should help children and young people develop the value of self-regulation of emotions through experiences with conflicts. Morality does not refer to feelings or desires. A student can express what upsets them, what they dislike about another person, by describing the acts. We must help children express their feelings without harming others, a necessary requirement for respectful and democratic coexistence. The actions of adults influence the reasons why norms are legitimized, as they serve as bridges of support, trust, and cooperation for students. To achieve peace, the absence of violence is not enough—interaction, interrelationship, and trust are essential (Lederach, 2012).

On the other hand, an effective resolution is one that minimizes or eliminates the causes of the conflict, not one that merely stifles or ends it. It may even remain unresolved, but what caused it must be addressed, reflecting deeply on the quality of relationships between individuals—a focus Kee always maintained with Pérola and other conflicts in the class when reconstituting the scenes. The development of assertiveness should always be our goal, along with reducing aggressiveness—that is, creating a space where the words, attitudes, and daily life of the school community are committed to an education for peace (Dupret, 2002). This is also highlighted by the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law, which identifies the school as responsible for developing a culture of peace, acting preventively, and combating violence.

> Article 12: IX - To promote awareness, prevention, and combating all forms of violence, especially systematic intimidation (bullying), within schools; X - To establish actions aimed at promoting a culture of peace in schools. (Brasil, 1996, s/p).

A culture of peace is a culture of dialogue; it must replace violence with words. It is possible to have conflicts without violence, as coexistence with difference and diversity will always exist. "[...] One individual is different from another; there is no denying that we are all different. Preserving this difference is fundamental so that we can speak of survival with dignity" (D'Ambrosio, 2012, p. 4). Conflict must be seen as a constructive dimension, and dialogue is the main instrument for resolving it, as demonstrated in the conduction of the talking circle, where all actors could express themselves with respect and listening. Democratic schools believe that this space of respect and coexisting WITH others is possible through the principles of democratic coexistence. These principles indicate that conflicts are resolved through coordinated, dialogue-based, intentional, systematized, and cooperative procedures. It is important that authoritarian, unilateral, centralized, and violent solutions be rejected. The school is a privileged place for coexistence and multiple interactions.

Democratic coexistence is a value emphasized in the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), which states that education must assume a holistic, human dimension, envisioning a society that is just, democratic, and inclusive. The skills to be developed, as outlined in the BNCC, include: resolving conflicts through respect for oneself and others; welcoming and valuing the diversity of individuals and social groups as a source of wealth rather than a universalizing attempt; exercising dialogue and empathy by arguing ethically; acting with autonomy by taking positions based on knowledge built at school through democratic, solidarity-driven, sustainable, inclusive, and ethical values; and recognizing oneself as an integral part of a collective for which one is responsible (Vinha; Nunes; Moro, 2019).

Ortega Ruiz (1997) defends the idea that coexistence is a network of interpersonal relationships in which communication processes, feelings, values, attitudes, roles, status, and power take shape. Tavares and Menin (2015) say that coexistence is democratic when solutions to conflicts and collective decision-making are based on dialogue and cooperative, democratic participation, rejecting authoritarian, individualistic, and submissive approaches. Considering the TDR process carried out amid the certainties and uncertainties that framed the conflicts, primarily led by Pérola and Lara, we believe that democratic coexistence is in a phase of construction and adjustment in this school community that has been deeply lived and experienced. It would be unfair to highlight conflicts without exploring the vectors of re-territorialization through mediation.

The purpose of this path is to educate democratic students. In the words of Vinha, Nunes, and Moro (2019, p. 140-141), "A democratic person is one who accepts and encourages the participation of all those involved in decisions that concern them, repudiating solutions imposed in an authoritarian way." Democratic coexistence should also encourage individuals to criticize certain norms, relationships, and customs, reflecting on and discussing new ways of coexisting, as was done when students were given the right to voice their opinions and said: "The school can also contribute to our well-being

by not removing physical education classes. We're not happy about this because it has been already six weeks without it" (Talking circle recording, November 2022).

The intervention should be multifaceted: in large groups such as classes, in smaller groups with closer connections and affinities, and even individually, involving the school institution as a whole. It is necessary to build a space to re-territorialize the dialogue that has been deterritorialized and has gone through paths of escape, reflection, and transformation. The actions are complementary: preventive, curative, and promotive.

There must be—and in the school in question, there has been—an institutional process and strategies to implement ethical and respectful dialogue as a means of resolving conflicts and making decisions at intentionally systematized and organized times.

The improvement of democratic coexistence requires following three steps: curricular, institutional, and interpersonal actions. This should also extend to access to knowledge, as well as respect for and coexistence with diversity.13

Considerations on the assay, which are not final...

The purpose of the schools we defend is to foster democratic coexistence as a result of implementing a culture of peace. We dream of a world in which people are happier and their bodies are increasingly less crossed by violence, until one day that violence ceases to exist.

Democratic coexistence can be understood as the exercise and dialogical experience within the cooperative dynamics among individuals in the school, as exemplified in the conversation circle of the golden class. Dialogue appears as an operator—that is, it is more than a value; it is essential for democratic coexistence. We can say that coexistence is democratic when it puts the values of justice, respect, solidarity, equality, and equity into action. It aims to neutralize discrimination and all forms of prejudice by valuing the diverse and multifaceted composition of Brazilian society.

At school, students coexist and interact with friends and non-friends. They must learn to navigate the dynamics of forces and negotiate spaces-territories, understanding the relationship between society and the various forms of power distribution. Schools are a fruitful/conducive space to develop an education in individuals, towards a society that is increasingly equitable, supportive, with strong values of justice, and, above all, democratic.

The resolution of a conflict, from a constructivist perspective, is not found in the product but resides in the process, much like the hints in cartography: attentive and always in motion, marked by achievements, knots, and crossings; it involves doing and undoing to do it over again. Conflicts are a natural and integral part of any relationship and will always exist, even in the most archetypal situations of peace and harmony. They provide hints about what each individual needs to learn. It is suggested that the educator reconstruct the conflict for the students, highlighting the problem so they can understand it; encourage them to verbalize feelings and desires; promote interaction, alternating

13- To further explore the steps for developing and improving democratic coexistence, we encourage the reader to consult the thesis by the same authors of this article.

moments of speaking and listening; and guide them to make suggestions, proposing solutions. In order for an actual change in behavior, it is necessary to reconstruct the events, consider possibilities, and anticipate probable consequences (Vinha; Nunes; Moro, 2019), as Kee, the teacher, did with her students Pérola and Lara.

Even if a school has few problems of coexistence, efforts must be made to improve the quality of relationships in pursuit of an increasingly positive climate that promotes the well-being of everyone in the institution. This means implementing a culture of peace.

The capacities we desire—justice, dignity, equality—cannot be developed without systematically planning and intentionally providing experiences that allow students to practice these values. Society will not always provide the necessary space for students to learn nor consistently offer these examples. Democratic coexistence plays a fundamental role in achieving a better, more humane, dignified, just, and ethical world. The deradicalization of violence and conflicts occurs through affections.

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Received on: February 2nd, 2024
Reviewed: April 22nd, 2024
Approved on: June 11th, 2024

Responsible Editor: Professor Renata Marcilio Candido, PhD.

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