

Fiftieth anniversary of "Angicos' 40 hours": the story, fresh in the memory of youth and adult education

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the experience of youth and adults alphabetizing known as “The 40 hours of Angicos” (RN) that celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in April 2013. It is a product of the work of the Center for Excellence in History and Memory of the Youth and Adult Education and Popular Education in Rio Grande do Norte. The idea is to unite the stories of this pedagogical and political experience through the voices of some of its co-authors that remembered contexts, projects and teaching practices experienced by them during that period. Interviews with thirteen of these co-authors were conducted in 2012 and 2013 and made the researchers think that, beyond alphabetizing, the power that keeps this experience alive is the ability to put into practice Paulo Freire’s principles, like the pedagogical relationship between knowing subjects that are considered innovative until today.

KEYWORDS

youth and adult education; memory; Angicos’ 40 hours.

CINQUENTENÁRIO DAS “40 HORAS DE ANGICOS”: MEMÓRIA PRESENTE NA EDUCAÇÃO DE JOVENS E ADULTOS

RESUMO

O texto discute a experiência de alfabetização com jovens e adultos conhecida como “As 40 horas de Angicos” (RN), que completou cinquenta anos em abril de 2013. O artigo é fruto do trabalho do Núcleo de Referência em História e Memória da Educação de Jovens e Adultos e da Educação Popular no Rio Grande do Norte, realizando um reencontro com as memórias dessa experiência político-pedagógica por meio da voz de alguns de seus protagonistas, aqui denominados coautores, que rememoraram contextos, propostas e práticas pedagógicas vivenciadas e experienciadas por eles naquele período. Entrevistas com treze desses coautores foram realizadas em 2012 e 2013, e a impressão que causaram aos pesquisadores, no processo de fazer emergir a memória daquele tempo, foi a de que, para além da alfabetização, a força que mantém essa experiência viva reside na capacidade de colocar em prática princípios freirianos inovadores ainda hoje, como a relação pedagógica entre sujeitos cognoscentes.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

educação de jovens e adultos; memória; 40 horas de Angicos.

CINCUNETENARIO DE LAS “40 HORAS DE ANGICOS”: MEMORIA PRESENTE EN LA EDUCACIÓN DE JÓVENES Y ADULTOS

RESUMEN

El texto discute la experiencia de alfabetización de jóvenes y adultos conocida como “As 40 horas de Angicos” (RN), que cumplió cincuenta años en abril de 2013. Este artículo es fruto del trabajo del Núcleo de Referência em História e Memória da Educação de Jovens e Adultos e da Educação Popular no Rio Grande do Norte y pretende ser un reencuentro con los recuerdos de esta experiencia político-pedagógica mediante las voces de algunos de sus protagonistas, aquí denominados “coautores”. Se realizaron entrevistas con trece de esos coautores en 2012 y 2013 en las cuales rememoraron contextos, propuestas y prácticas pedagógicas vividas y experimentadas por ellos en aquel período. En este proceso de recuperación de la memoria, los investigadores tuvieron la impresión de que la fuerza de esta experiencia –más allá de la alfabetización en sí misma– fue su capacidad de colocar en práctica principios de Paulo Freire (como la relación pedagógica entre sujetos cognoscentes), aún hoy innovadores.

PALABRAS CLAVE

educación de jóvenes y adultos; memoria; 40 horas de Angicos.

*If nothing is left from these pages, we hope at least one thing remains:
our trust in people. Our faith in men and in the creation of a world
where it isn't so hard to love.*

FREIRE, 1987, p. 184

"Forty hours in Angicos", an experiment with youth and adult literacy in the dry. Interior *sertão* region of Brazil's Northeast is currently one of the projects most often revisited by scholars, researchers and educators who are in some way connected to democratic and emancipating educational concepts. A literacy proposal that combined political aspirations, pedagogical will and objective and subjective reality had never been experienced, created and reinvented in such a short time. And it did so while working with a group of people that, until that time, did not have access to this technological resource of literate society – the alphabetic system. Although the experiment was brief, it carried many meanings, which were later intensified in other spaces and occasions beyond the quiet Northeastern city of Angicos. Its political and epistemological importance has acquired the features of a genuinely Brazilian educational philosophy through the works of its author, Paulo Freire (1921-1997). What we now study, analyze and critically denominate as *Freirean* thinking was intensively put into practice among 300 men and women workers from the Northeast, under the guidance of students from the Federal University at Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN), and coordinated by Freire himself.

The experience of "Forty Hours in *Angicos*" is not only a didactic and methodological project that was successful because of the power of its social circumstances. If that were the case, Brazilian and international educators would have a fragile memory of it, or none at all, and this experience would not continue to provoke so many different references, visits and memories after 50 years. The educational proposal undertaken by Freire in this experimentshred the operating molds of conventional literacy programs of the time. Until today it is a reference for youth and adult literacy projects, schooling and education throughout Brazil and in other countries. To talk about this experience, beyond what is theorized in academic texts, allows penetrating deeply into the act of remembering, to participate from, upon and with the inside (Freire, 1982) in and of the place where the ideals materialized. That place is Angicos, a quiet town, where crickets screech in the midday heat of 40°C and in which many of the students that were part of this history of emancipation still live. Through a literacy project committed to a less fortunate social class, Freire and his entire team helped Severino, Francisca, Paulo, Maria, Luzia, Valdenice, Idália and many others to talk and write freely about life in new and different ways, from a place where they think and are not only thought of. The original idea¹ of this article was to bring this experience to the present moment,

1 The original article was ordered by Anped's GT 18 (Youth and Adult Education) for the 36th Annual Reunion that happened between the end of September and the beginning of October 2013, in Goiania at the Universidade Federal de Goiás, Campus Samambaia.

beginning from the place and with the men and women who still talk about the joy of having learned to read and write through this experience.

The voices of those men and women who learned to read and write in 40 hours still reverberate from the humble places they inhabited and where they still reside. They are unusual, full of real life and we present them as "firsts" in a way contrary to the canonic manners of investigating reality, recognizing that we can only speak significantly about what we know. Fifty years later, both coordinators and students of the "40-hour" experiment continue to represent the living memory of youth and adult education (EJA) in our country, built on Freirean principles. These people consider themselves co-authors of this experience.

This article provides a rereading of the experience, or even a reading of *a world* where, in 40 hours, it was possible to teach how to read and write by subverting the narrow hegemonic logic, methods, conceptions and relations in education. To remember this experience 50 years later is not only to recognize a historic event, but is an urgent social and educational need in current efforts to confront illiteracy and low schooling rates among youth and adults. We believe that the principles that guided the "40-hour" program can still stimulate this desire, will and need for campaigns and struggles to create liberating literacy actions, schooling and education.

The "spirit" we have embodied to discuss in an article about this 50-year-old project that produced such a huge influence on pedagogical thinking, in studies, research, theses, and dissertations was "to talk with" as much as it was "to talk about". To do so, we had as our companions those who describe themselves as co-authors, the main characters of the time, who we found during the effort to compose a mosaic undertaken by the Nucleus for the History and Memory of Youth and Adult and Popular Education in Rio Grande do Norte (NUHMEJA).

We proposed a reencounter with the memories of this political and pedagogical literacy experiment that, upon its 50th anniversary, helps to locate Paulo Freire in his rightful place in the Brazilian education scenario – a place that is frequently denied or ignored because of prejudice or lack of knowledge. Only 40 hours of initial literacy classes were planned for Angicos, but this experiment was considered by Freire as an opportunity to expand the proposal for an educational system that would begin with reading and writing and then include other levels. Because of this proposal and his entire body of work, he became recognized worldwide as an educator who criticized traditional education and proposed that it be transformed based on the principles of valuing the knowledge students have and on using dialog as a form of establishing relationships among people. In this way, the experience consists in a landmark of Freirean thought and was introduced into the historical context of the social, political and popular mobilizations of the 1950s and 1960s in the Brazilian Northeast. This was one of the most politically effervescent regions in Brazil at the time, and was also a region with considerable limitations in its literacy and schooling processes, especially for youth and adults. To reencounter those men and women, the coordinators of the culture circles, the students and their many memories, in which the Brazilian thinker is intertwined, is, at the very least, to become impregnated with new emancipating desires, and

with a desire for social equality and the production of a decent existence as Freire affirmed in his work.

We will address this history by using the voices of these co-authors, in the sense proposed by Certeau, by remembering through the voices of the participants the contexts, spaces, times, places, proposals and practices of a liberating and emancipating educational project. The paper begins with a presentation of the work's origin and the context of its elaboration, followed by a description of the historical and geographical situations (the municipality of Angicos) where the experiment-took place. We also present theco-authors of this experience and discuss their daily pedagogical activities based on their own narratives. Finally, we present the movement's consequences and repercussions.

RESEARCHERS AND THE SPACES, TIMES, PLACES OF RESEARCH IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NUHMEJA/RN'S

The Nucleus for History and Memory of Youth and Adult and Popular Education in Rio Grande do Norte (NUHMEJA) emerged at the Federal University at Rio Grande do Norte in the second semester of 2010 with an incentive from the Secretariat for Continued Education, Literacy and Diversity (SECAD) of the Ministry of Education (MEC) and in partnership with the State University of Rio Grande do Norte (UERN), to contribute to the reconstitution of EJA and popular education in the state. This would enable both the recovery and promotion of its historic legacy in various social and educational realms. NUHMEJA associated itself to a national effort made by several universities, after the Rio de Janeiro State University (UERJ) proposed to the SECAD a project to recover the memory of EJA and popular education programs throughout Brazil. To do so, we gathered didactic material, films, documents, photos, scientific and promotional materials. We recorded them to create audio and video fragments of the memory of people who took part in or registered the memory of youth and adult and popular education. We organized and released this material, documents and statements about the history of EJA and popular education in Rio Grande do Norte State and presented it on a website.² This contributed to the preservation of this memory as well as to the fruition, diffusion and wider application of both scientific and cultural knowledge in this field, to more people interested in the theme. By gathering, organizing and releasing the material, we hope to facilitate other studies about education and especially about EJA and popular education.

We have chosen a methodological approach based on an evidentiary paradigm (Ginzburg, 1989), which helped us to organize the material and statements collected for the website. With the fragments produced we were able to organize a mosaic that can be used by other researchers. Ginzburg (*idem*, p. 179) teaches us to live by our "role as one with knowledge", to the degree that we perceive signs in

2 www.nuhmeja.ce.ufrn/nuhmeja

the narrated memory that help us to read the milieu in which we are inserted and the scenario of events.

The work of the research nucleus was guided by the idea of giving voice to the subjects of these experiences. In this article, we will dialog with them and will discuss what we learned by talking to them. The pieces of the mosaic that we present here were produced from the statements of the main characters and co-authors of these experiences. They were recorded in their homes in the second semester of 2012, in the case of the students, and in the first semester of 2013, in the case of the coordinators of the culture circles. All of the interviews followed an open script previously defined by the group with the contribution of other members of the NUHMEJA. We also interviewed Francisco Alves da Costa Sobrinho, who is a researcher at the Nucleus, and a journalist who has been a cultural and political activist in Natal since that time. In addition to the interviews, we considered a speech given by Valquíria Silva, a culture circle coordinator and a talk by culture circle coordinator Marcos Guerra, presented at the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of 40 Hours in Angicos.

The people interviewed were former students of the experiment: Francisca de França Germano, Idália Marrocos da Silva, Luzia de Andrade, Maria Eneide de Araújo Melo, Maria Luzia da Silva Andrade, Maria Miranda Gomes, Maria Pequena de Souza, Valdice Ivonete da Costa Santos and Zélia Irene da Silva. As well as the culture circle coordinators: Pedro Neves Cavalcante, Lenira Leite Matos da Costa, Rosali Maria Liberato Cavalcante and Dilma Ferreira Lima. Pedro and Rosali, were engaged in 1963 and are now married, and were interviewed on the porch of their home in Natal. The interviews did not follow a rigid and controlled set of questions and answers. We tried to follow what Thompson (1992, p. 255) describes as a "free 'conversation' where the 'person,' 'tradition-holder,' 'witness' or 'narrator' is 'invited to talk' about an issue of common interest".

The scripts with prepared questions served as a guideline to raise topics that we considered important, leaving those interviewed comfortable to establish an order and highlight what was most important to them. Based on Thompson's (*idem*) study, we understood that the least we interfered in the narrative with questions, the better. But we understand that an interview cannot be completely unstructured. Therefore we would explain the main purpose of our conversation and, as the first question, we would ask them to tell us how the experiment came into their lives. We also asked about the political-social context of the times, about the daily pedagogical activities and how they affected their lives.

The narratives of every interviewees indicated the political-pedagogical coherence of Freire's effort to make people literate in the sense of helping them become aware of themselves as men and women in the world and with the world. We observed that each of the students and coordinators, in his or her own way, highlighted the *reading of the world* as the first moment of articulation in the literacy process.

A strong influence of the collective memory (Halbwachs, 1990) is noticed in the individual memories of the people we spoke with, when the individuals incorporate knowledge about their community and its social space, and in this way

comprehend their development in a historical context. The knowledge constituted by the sociocultural memory is not only a recollection, but a merger of experiences in the recollection of a community and social memory that allows its members to understand themselves as part of a society that transforms itself together. Social memory creates a connection with the past, as an obligatory place of passage for all reflections about our relationship with time, knowledge and the possibility of building a future (*idem, ibidem*). We understand that our roles as researchers and organizers of the discoveries within the Nucleus is to register these individual memories and share them with society, so that they will become part of the collective memory of EJA and popular education, which is often built on official discourses that do not consider the participants.

The purpose of the recovery and revival of memory is not to keep us in the past, thinking about what happened, but to emphasize its importance for the construction of what we are today and to link it to the present and the future by teaching us and contributing to our present productions (Le Goff, 1996).

EMANCIPATING CONTEXTS: SUBVERSIONS AND INTENTIONS OF AN EDUCATIONAL PROPOSAL INTUNE WITH ITS TIME

Since the 1940s, Rio Grande do Norte was a very productive field for EJA and popular education. Organized by the Catholic Church, the so called Natal Movement³ encouraged popular organizations and social actions in different areas, contributing to the mobilization of various sectors, especially among youth, in the struggle to improve living conditions. The state itself was very active, as was the Catholic Church, but they were not alone. Many other initiatives were conducted by political activists from the Communist Party and its ramifications; by students from the National Students Union (UNE), state student unions, student groups known as academic centers from various universities, as well as union, educational and popular culture movements (Silva, 2013). The socio-political context of the late 1950s and early 1960 swasripe with conflicts about the country's path, which contributed to the intensification of social mobilizations, struggles and demands, including those for the expansion of education that is more dedicated to the lower classes. Then the need arose to "politicize" defense of a common right for education, mobilizing society around this perspective. Pedagogical and methodological proposals permeated with this sense of democracy and the importance of over-

3 That was the name of a group of Catholic Church's actions carried out between 1930 and 1960. They were built on the encouragement of cooperativism; effort to organize the chaos left in Natal when the American army left after Second World War; creation of *Serviço de Assistência Rural* – SAR (Rural Social Assistance); organization of youth groups according to French/Belgic methodologies; *Juventude Agrária Católica* – JAC (Agrarian Catholic Youth), JEC (Students), JIC (Independent), JOC (Workers), JUC (College Students); radio schools; MEB (literacy); among others (Lucena, 2012). Natal's Movement had D. Eugênio Sales as a leader, who also defended the organization in syndicates by rural working class in order to try to avoid the left political powers from becoming leaders, as happened in other states (Azevêdo, 2013).

coming social inequality were also realized. Paulo Freire's thinking was inserted in this cultural and political milieu, and became immersed in this environment of pioneering experiments in the field that would later be known as popular education, and that still inspires progressive pedagogical practices.

This was the time of the Cold War, and a strong tension between the "Imperialist Bloc", led by the United States, which was expanding its domination, and the "Socialist Bloc" led by the Soviet Union with the collaboration of Mao Tsé-Tung's China. There were echoes from the Cuban Revolution, which was invaded, and placed under economic embargo, The dispute for power was also an economic dispute in which Latin America was a prize. The big powers needed to expand their markets, which was already happening in Brazil, particularly under the government of President Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-1961). He came to office with the slogan "Fifty years in five", which promoted social and economic modernization to place Brazil on the international capitalist scene. The development impulse generated opposition, social contradictions became sharper, social movements were organized and dedicated to a less unequal and more democratic society, to benefit the entire population.

The presidential elections of 1960 demonstrated the polarization of Brazilian society in two opposing forces: the National Democratic Union (UDN) and the Brazilian Labor Party (PTB). Natal maintained its tradition during the campaign, as a "Little Moscow" (because in the 1930's the Communist Party had deposed the government and controlled the state for three days), and gave a clean sweep to PTB, which was considered to be leftist and had lost in the rest of the country (Costa Sobrinho, 2013).

On the other hand, Natal had also been known as "the springboard to victory". It earned this nickname because of its strategic geographic location, and because it served as home to a U.S. military base during World War II, under a deal made with then Brazilian President Getúlio Vargas. During this period, the city grew rapidly (army, navy and air force bases were built that still stand today) and in population (including U.S. soldiers, Hollywood artists who came to entertain the troops and migrants from the countryside).

As both "Little Moscow" and "the springboard to victory", Natal had two political leaders. On one side was Governor Aluísio Alves, who was born in Angicos and during whose mandate Paulo Freire coordinated the educational experience. He was elected in 1960 breaking an oligarchy ruled by former governor Dinarte Mariz. On the other side was Natal Mayor Djalma Maranhão who represented Rio Grande do Norte's progressive forces, which defended the fight against the New State and Fascism. The two would have been opponents in the planned gubernatorial elections, but they were cancelled because of the military coup. By proposing the literacy project, Governor Aluísio Alves also sought to confront the Natal mayor, who was gaining power and space through his work with education, under the "One can also learn to read barefoot" campaign created in 1961 under education secretary Moacyr de Góes with popular participation. The campaign was extended to the state's interior in partnership with several municipal governments.

Angicos was a municipality with high illiteracy rates, like many others throughout the Northeast, and it was also the governor's hometown.

Aluizio Alves' development project was accomplished through planning of governmental actions and the hiring of technicians from various fields. Journalist Francisco Calazans Fernandes was invited to implant an education program that, among other objectives, sought to teach 100,000 adults in the state to read. It was Calazans Fernandes who invited Paulo Freire to accomplish this great task. He did so because people in Pernambuco had told him about Freire's work with pilot literacy projects in conjunction with the staff of the former Cultural Extension Service (SEC) of Recife University - now the Federal University at Pernambuco (UFPE).

The amount of money sent by the U.S. Alliance for Progress to finance this project was equivalent to a year of the state's tax revenues. To circumvent regulations barring the state from directly contracting an agency with foreign resources, the Cooperative Education Service of Rio Grande do Norte (SECERN) was created. It was an autarchy controlled by the education secretary and became responsible for operating the "40 hours in Angicos" program.

The proposal was to conduct a 40-hour literacy experiment in Angicos. It would be coordinated by Freire, who took the opportunity to expand the public participating in his political-pedagogical proposal, even if it was financed by the U.S. Alliance for Progress. The governor agreed to Freire's demand that there would be no political or ideological influence from local politicians or from the Alliance for Progress.

When the experiment began, Angicos had an arid and undeveloped geographic, political, economic, cultural and educational reality. Unfortunately, this has not changed very much since then. In 1960, according to a census mentioned by Lyra (1996), the city had 9,542 inhabitants and only two schools. Approximately 75% of the local population was illiterate at the time according to Lobo (1963).

Located 156 km from Rio Grande do Norte's capital, Angicos now has, 11,549 inhabitants according to the 2010 census by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). The population is mostly rural and depends on agriculture and fishing, although it has other sources of income like commerce and government offices. It is situated in a very warm region and its population is very familiar with a lack of water and the basic products that require water. In terms of education, the city now has one state high school, and eight elementary schools, five are municipal and three run by the state. The city is home to the Federal University of the Semi-arid (UFERSA). Despite various initiatives, over the past 50 years, 26.5% of the population 15 or older is still illiterate, according to a Rio Grande do Norte Education Observatory study that showed how the problem was faced between 1991 and 2010. The 2010 census by IBGE also found that 54.% of people 10 or older were uneducated or did not finish primary school.

Freire's legacy in Angicos is the great memory of the invention of hope. Angicos was the city - the fertile ground - in which Paulo Freire practiced and improved his ideals and the base for his future productions and reflections. It was also where Freire found his people and his roots. Every educator that has studied Freire's pedagogy has heard of the Angicos experiment. This is the memory we lov-

ingly callan invention of hope. It is an invention in the sense that it makes visible what is not seen, by breaking and shattering political and cultural configurations of spaces infected by traditional models of society, of being human and education. We believe that Freire, stirred by the sense that he belonged to that region that had long suffered under political oligarchies, became so disturbed that he gave birth to this experience together with his colleagues.

Paulo Freire described his feelings for Angicos when he received the title of "Angican" citizen on the 30th anniversary of Forty hours in Angicos: "I have never felt more emotionally touched then right here and right now". This sentence is now written on the portal at the entrance to the municipality of Angicos, greeting every visitor.

COORDINATORS AND STUDENTS: UNIQUE SUBJECTS

Under the perspective we are adopting, of making these men and women visible as co-authors of this experience, we now present our understanding of who they are and how they acted.

THE COORDINATORS OF THE CULTURE CIRCLES: YOUNG WANDERERS AND APPRENTICES OF SERTANEJA CULTURE

The year of 1963 is a historical landmark for Brazilian education, because it is the year politically and pedagogically articulated to the literacy of youth and adults, based on Paulo Freire's educational conceptions and under his guidance. The culture circle's coordinators said it was possible to perceive the political range and methodological quality expressed in the effort to teach young people and adults how to read and write in such a short time.

From our perspective, those students, under those circumstances, are along with Freire, apprentices, and wanderers among sertaneja culture. [The semi-arid region of the Brazilian Northeast is known as the sertão and the people and their culture are known as sertaneja] Those young college students embedded themselves in the subjective and objective reality of Angicos and its overwhelming illiteracy. They learned with those voices, with the people and their styles, cultures, economic limitations and their particular languages and ways of understanding the world. There was simultaneous learning by the young college students and the men and women just beginning to learn to read and write. On one hand, were the coordinators who were learning how to exercise their citizenship while educating and dialoging with a world that was completely different from their own and their academic theories. On the other hand, there were young students, also a part of the world, but who had never experienced a literacy process, which was so important to their sertaneja existence. Freire did not conceive of and conduct the project on his own. His dreams were so brave that he inspired other young people to accept the challenge along with him.

Former culture circle coordinator and retired appeals court judge Valquíria Félix Silva – who was a law student at the time – was honored as an honorary

Angicos citizen on the 50th Anniversary of 40 Hours in Angicos. In her thank-you speech, she described the culture circle coordinators as:

[...] young college students [...] who were moved by a strong idealism composed not only of good will or theory, but also and, most importantly, of the ability to generate conscious, instigating and consequential actions. We were in a hurry, considering how much we had to be, think and do (Silva, 2013, p. 2).

To hear the lectures and discourses of the young people of that time, who are now quite advanced in age, and speaking with them reveals to us signs that this description cannot be singular for all of them. Most of them were students at the Federal University at Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN) and were invited to the project by Marcos Guerra, a leader of the student movement at UFRN's law school, and the son of the law school director, Otto Guerra, who was also an ally of Calazans Fernandes, the state's education secretary. Their narratives help us perceive both the multiplicity and the uniqueness of these individuals who voluntarily engaged in this task for various reasons. One high school student and about 20 college students from different courses (pharmacy, pedagogy, law, social service, odontology and philosophy), committed themselves to the cause through their political involvement or idealism, hoping to contribute to deep changes in society, and also influenced by friendship or romance, as we have been told by the former coordinators Lenira Leite and Rosali Cavalcante.

Regardless of the reason that led them to volunteer for the experience (which involved no competitive selection), everyone took an initial 10-class course given by Paulo Freire and his team from the SEC, at the UFRN law school. Freire presented general guidelines about the principles of the project and about the contradictions, difficulties and effervescent Brazilian reality, of the time. Besides him, the teacher most remembered by the coordinators interviewed was Aurenice Cardoso Costa, who discussed the methodological path, its steps and the preparation of the audiovisual material. Other teachers gave classes about Brazilian economics, culture and development planning.

For most of them, being a part of this experience was a great lesson and a once in a lifetime opportunity for learning. They tell this story with the personal involvement and commitment forged in their own educational process and in the conviviality between them their co-workers and students. Of course they became more than co-workers and friends. They had their lives changed by participating in this experience as apprentices to Paulo Freire. They were touched by his simplicity, and way of conducting the process. Unexpected surprises were received as practical contributions that impregnate and modify the theory. They consider themselves apprentices just as much as the students – apprentices of life and its learning processes.

The work in Angicos finished one year before the April 1964 military coup that installed a military dictatorship in Brazil, but the co-authors of the 40-hours program continued working on its application (which we will discuss later). Of those interviewed, only Lenira and Rosali returned to Natal to continue their studies. For this reason we can say that, for the coordinators, the 40-hours

experience concluded with a sense of both impotence and silence. This sentiment is well expressed in a Chico Buarque de Holanda song (1968): "There are days that we feel like someone who has departed or died, suddenly we stopped, or was it the world that grew, we want to make our voices heard and command our own destiny, but the wheel of life comes around and carries our longing away[...]". They were all uncomfortable with what was happening, their fates were separated, some of them became professionals who established careers; Marcos Guerra was arrested and then exiled in Belgium; Paulo Freire was also exiled, accused of subversion of order and of inciting revolution through education. This is how Silva (2013) described this moment:

And what about us? What about our group? What happened to us? We were forced to separate. And, even worse, we were told to keep away from each other, to not see or to talk to each other. Could that be possible? For how long? Some of the co-workers were arrested, Marcos was exiled and even Paulo Freire had to leave the country. It was a sudden and dreadful change, like an earthquake in our worlds. We sought refuge and reoriented our lives. We studied, finished our college courses, set our course, kept going and here we are, safe and sound.

The material that they used and those for the students were burned or buried, leaving no trace to not endanger the participants. The pressure was so intense that most of this material vanished from the hands of those who participated in the experiment. Only Carlos Lyra was able to keep some records of the work that would later (1996) become a book *Forty Hours in Angicos* in which he said his stepmother's brother let him hide the material in his attic. A feeling of impotence spread among the coordinators of the 40-hours— as it did all over Brazil — and the feeling prevailed even at the end of the dictatorship. Still wary, they said they didn't remember much of the experience and have created shielded truths about the experience. Only with the country's redemocratization in the 1980s did many of them see each other again and begin to speak about the experience.

MEN AND WOMEN OF LIFE: THE STUDENTS FROM THE 40 HOURS OF HOPE

Brazil's social history is marked by class relations and a culture accentuated by political and capitalist interests that leave some groups, people and regions inferior to others. Part of this scenario is the result of the colonization process as well as the segregating forms of human formation imposed by these historical processes. In simultaneous response to this hegemonic domination, many people, groups, regions and communities established other forms of existence, finding daily tactics to get around (Certeau, 2011) impositions made from top to bottom and from the outside. These are men and women whose lives are weaved by resistance and bold efforts who had great difficulty in developing their ways of being in the world and believing in the possibility of better days. They struggle for a life that is more dignified and less controlled by the hegemony of a small political-economic group.

Those men and women from Angicos took part in the 40-hour literacy/politicizing process, inserted in a poor geographical region, where there were short-

ages of both water and constitutional rights. In meeting with the coordinators and their proposal they saw the possibility of the "waters", the symbol of abundance in that land, which could offer the ability to quench the thirst of years of repression, and a collective and critical opportunity to consider their realities. For those people, to become literate went far beyond their conceptions of learning, of school and formal education (Germano, 2012; Gomes, 2012). No one had ever come to them before in their places of joy, sadness and conviviality to talk about their desires and needs (Souza, 2012; Santos, 2012). Differently from the paternalism to which they were accustomed, as students, they felt respected in their uniqueness. Some of them even resisted, insisting it was impossible to learn to read, because it was like "getting milk from a stone", but then they would realize that the process involved a dialog among people, knowledge and culture, and not a foreign, closed monolog that would be useless in their lives.

In her speech at the ceremony to mark the 50th anniversary of 40 hours in Angicos, the appeals court judge Valquíria recalled the lines of the poem *The Illiterate*, by Natal poet Zé Praxedis, which was written for the students of the 40-hours program who worked with it in their last class (Lyra, 1996).

Boss, sit here by the root of this tree
 And listen to Zé Vicente Ferreira's sad story
 This story, young man, is very sad
 It has the sadness of a bellowing bull sniffing the ground
 where his brother's blood has been shed
 And I can tell you the reason for this sadness
 It's because my eyes have light, but the light can't help me see
 the secret of writing, with such beautiful letters
 of the people who know how to read.
 (Praxedis *apud* Silva, 2013)

It is a story told in more than twenty verses that the culture circle coordinators used to draw the attention of potential students in the streets, squares and small farms in Angicos (Silva, 2013). With these lines they got the attention of many people because they were words from their daily life, a reality they knew well. They are men and women who see themselves as the verses describe, and who are now proud of being characters in this common story. They are men and women united by hard work in the fields, planting for a boss and for subsistence, but each one is unique, with his or her own story.

All nine women we interviewed told us stories of their lives in the fields. They were poor and as women of the interior of the Northeast suffered even more. In addition to not having the right to go to school, because there were none, or because of too much work at an early age, being female was also a reason to not go to school. This condition particularly marked the life of one of the interviewees. As the daughter of a farmer she told us her own mother did not let her go to school so she wouldn't learn how to read and write to potential boyfriends: "[...] an aunt

of mine had a school, but at that time parents wouldn't let their daughters to go to school, so they wouldn't learn to read and write to boyfriends" (Souza, 2012).

However, this is not an unusual aspect in the literacy of youth and adults, since we are aware of the sexist historic heritage in which we were educated. But it was not the story told by Maria Pequena de Souza, a denunciation of reality, that would disturb Paulo Freire and the culture circle coordinators. It was the way the historic denial of their rights to life, and specifically, to education is problematized. This is precisely why they proposed an educational system that would address all these personal and collective situations. It is from the reading of the particular universe of each unique man and woman that everyone (the idealizer and the coordinators) would occupy themselves philosophically and pedagogically to develop the literacy process with youth and adults in Angicos in only forty hours.

[...] they went door-to-door, surveying the number of illiterate people, to talk to them, asking them what [words] they used in everyday life, their most important words. Words for work, for family, kitchen words, home words [...] the most interesting part of the method was the respect they showed for each one as a person. (Cavalcante, P., 2013; Cavalcante, R., 2013)

The direct and horizontal contact the coordinators had with their students-to-be in their communities promoted a re-encounter of those men and women with their social history. That is why, according to Pedro and Rosali Cavalcante (*idem*), the students did not feel like strangers in the culture circles. In the coordinators' statements we notice that their survey of words was not an empirical exercise for its own sake but a hopeful dialog that those men and women engaged in amongst each other that recognized their condition as people like us. As one student, Francisca de França Germano (2012), told us: "[...] she (the teacher) would write PO-VO [people] on the blackboard! I did not know what people meant. I did not know if I was people, I learned that in Paulo Freire's school".

This dialogical practice characterized the *teaching-learning* relationship in the 40-hours experience. The dialog was provoked by the encounter of these various human beings and encouraged the appearance of what would later be called "generative themes". Those themes did not reach people ready made, and they were not dormant, they were invented in and through the dialogs of daily life.

To talk to the students of the 40-hour experiment 50 years later led us to a better comprehension of the place from which they lived this movement. They are people whose daily lives lacked basic elements of survival, such as public health services, sanitation services, good housing and so many other things that are very important for a good life. What is still very common to notice in what they say, is their capacity for joy and hope, the utopian way they think of life and the world with the same intensity as at the time of the experience. Some of them, at an advanced age like D. Idália (83 years), show a positive attitude towards life as well as a desire to actively take part in life. We verified this willingness when they told us that even though they were elderly (they were all older than 66) they would take part in social activities, such as going to church or the bank. Some would sew, do housework, and

they always emphasized that they worked and intended to keep on controlling their own life. Even though many of the interviewees said they continued their studies after the 40-hour program, none had completed a basic education.

THE DAILY PEDAGOGY OF THE EXPERIENCE

Fifty years ago, about 300 people became literate in Angicos. The origin of those changes began 51 years ago, with negotiations about the realization of the experiment and the arrival of the first participants' to Angicos in late 1962. We can summarize the events by saying that in November of that year a small group of UFRN students arrived in Angicos together with SEC professionals to research the words people used in their daily life, and to promote the literacy project. They stayed until December of that year, when the enrollment also occurred. In January, 1963, the whole team of culture circle coordinators participated in the course with Paulo Freire and his staff at the UFRN law school, and they returned to Angicos on January 18 for the inaugural class. They then had to wait for the material and equipment for the classes. Lyra (1996) says that the delay created some disbelief among the students about whether the project was going to happen. But the first class was held on January 24, it was the so-called "culture class" in which there was a discussion about the local reality and culture. Four days later, on January 28, the first generative word – *belota* – was presented in each culture circle, initiating the process of knowing and understanding the alphabetical system. At the end of the project, in March, two exams were given: one on reading and writing and the other on politicization. According to Lyra (*idem*) the tests were developed by the coordinators based on a model sent by the SEC technicians and their grades were higher than 70%. However, the students we interviewed did not seem to remember this part of the experiment. The last class took place on March 16, a Saturday, and on April 2 there was a closing ceremony with Rio Grande do Norte State Governor Aluísio Alves, Brazilian President João Goulart, as well as Paulo Freire and other authorities.

With the survey of words and the selection of the generative words conducted by the first group of culture circle coordinators in late 1962 under the watch of Paulo Freire's team, the first stage of the method was begun and would support the preparation of the educational material (slides, designs, cards with families of syllables) while the adult literacy project was being promoted. The women who arrived in Angicos were lodged at a Catholic school for nuns and the men, who were fewer in number, stayed in the house of the city's priest. Initially they would go out through several neighborhoods walking through the streets or with a sound truck. According to Valquíria Félix Silva (2013, p. 4):

We would go from house to house, we got to know them, hug them sincerely, we would laugh together, listen to them and tell them stories, and talk, a lot... That is how we got their trust. Yes, because, at the beginning there was widespread mistrust, because as they told us "the blind man is suspicious of big handouts" and it is difficult to overcome the distrust of the caboclo. At the time

they were calloused by promises, by being misled and by the long-term truism that "the poor are only remembered at election time".

Around 410 words were identified, of which 16 were chosen to be worked with in the 40 hours. The first of them, *belota*, refers to the ornaments on the reins and equipment used by the cow hands. But before the introduction, discussion and beginning to read and write these words, the process began with questioning the reading of the world during the "culture class", with the use of cards and pictures of local culture. To provoke discussion these cards did not have any written words and to develop the understanding that we are all generators of culture and producers of knowledge.

Parallel to the classes, the culture circle coordinators met daily to discuss and exchange experiences. They would spend the entire morning evaluating the classes from the night before, debating challenges and thinking about how to overcome them. Their afternoons were dedicated to planning the classes for that night and, in this movement, they would reinvent the theory and methods, creating new slides and ways of mediating the student's reading (Cavalcante, R., 2013). Paulo Freire was present for some of these days of intense work and discussion.

All of the interviews and lectures given by the coordinators emphasized that this moment of joint work—supported by dialog and reflection about the practice - was essential to both the literacy process and their own learning and the improvement of the practice and theory. In this context the desired *theory-practice relationship* was achieved. According to Marcos Guerra (2013):

[...] since we were all simultaneously coordinators and students during the Forty Hours, we were the co-authors. We began with one of Paulo's theories. In some moments we learned from them, in others our practice questioned Paulo's theory, our practice improved Paulo's theory, and required Paulo to reconsider some items, not only Paulo, but the whole team from the center.

Coordinators describe Paulo Freire as a simple, kind and respectful person who was always fascinated by the discoveries they made during their practices and the changes these discoveries provoked. They remember Paulo as an advisor and also as a student who let himself be sensitized by the process and would also reflect and reconsider the theory based on the practice. He was open to dialog and talked with those college students about his political-philosophical and methodological proposal. This would create a dialog between theory and practice. According to Valquiria Félix Silva (2013, p. 6):

We would gather forms, illustrated by suggestions or events that we registered. When Paulo Freire visited us, he would be thrilled with our discoveries seeing

4 The use of this spelling, learned with Professor Nilda Alves, expresses the understanding that theory and practice are not dissociable.

us as partners in his own creation. His joy would increase our enthusiasm, since he was the personification of enthusiasm and a multiplier of friendships.

The reading and writing process involved the anthropological principle of humanization, although linguistic and other issues were involved. Yet the statements of both students and coordinators show there was more involved than a simple method for learning to read and write and dichotomist hierarchical relations between teacher/student, teaching/learning and literate/illiterate. To teach reading and writing from Freire's perspective involved dialog, mediated by the words of each human being, who is incarnated in and with the world. "If it is by saying the word, men enunciate and transform the world, dialog is the route by which men gain meaning as men" (Freire, 1987, p. 79).

In the interviews we held with the 40-hours students, we noticed that Freirean principles were mostly observed in the pedagogical relationship. The idea of a pedagogical practice different from traditional ones, the dialog, the use of words from their universe, were very strong in their memories of the relations established with the coordinators. Although the classrooms werenot necessarily physically organized in circles, dialog was present and knowledge circulated. Guided by liberating and democratic pedagogical principles, the coordinators would dialog with Angico's reality, especially that in which the workers were directly immersed. We often observed in the statements of both students' and coordinators' that the circles took place in community spaces, in environments common to their social relations. These classrooms functioned in spaces that were made available, inside their homes, farms, public health centers or even a police station. Most of the people we interviewed participated in the circle in the Alto da Alegria neighborhood.

Those work moments which were previously described were also moments of creation based on reflections about the daily pedagogical practices undertaken by the coordinators. During classes, when facing the challenges of the practice, trying to overcome the difficulties of the reading process, the coordinators would produce new forms of pedagogical intervention that, when discussed in groups, would be appropriated by all the coordinators in their classes. In their statements they mention: (a) the production of new cards designed to handle new words and discussions that would arise. The production of this material had the decisive contribution of Carlos Lyra, who was responsible for photographing the project and who was always available and capable of handling the manual work (Cavalcante, R., 2013); (b) Use of the Brazilian constitution in the classes to support the discussions of political issues related to citizens' rights (Lima, 2013); (c) The drafting of letters to other students and to the politicians who would be coming to the closing ceremony (Lima, 2013; Germano, 2012); (d) The comparison between syllables and bricks to facilitate the understanding of the construction of words according to the syllabic method used. During one of her classes, Dilma, a coordinator, made the comparison between the organization of syllables and the mounting of bricks in construction. She described letters as half-bricks. This procedure was adopted by all the culture circles (Lima, 2013).

In the statement of every culture circle coordinator the memory of their concerns about whether the students were learning or not was present. The effort and care they took each day during those moments of group discussion and in the classes, so that they could all learn and advance, is also made clear by their statements. Their political, pedagogical and personal commitment to the project was also evident.

Another event emphasized by the coordinators interviewed was the absence of students at the beginning of the rainy season, in March 1963. In a region where people survive by farming and since all students worked in the fields, the arrival of the rains brought the opportunity to work and made some of them choose to "fill their stomachs" rather than "end the hunger of their mind", to use expressions from Carlos Lyra (1996).

At the same time, according to Lima (2013) many students asked for an increase in the number of class hours towards the end. So the classes ended at 9:30 pm instead of 9 pm, and they also had classes on Saturday. This request was motivated by the need they felt for more learning opportunities. In their interviews, the students reaffirmed this need, always expressing their wish that the project would have lasted longer. During our talks we noticed that a lot of what they experienced is still alive in their memories, they remember the project with joy and longing. These feelings make clear the absence of and urgent need for literacy policies of this scope.

We have the impression that beyond learning to read and write the power of this experience was its ability to put Freire's innovative principles in practice like the pedagogical relationship that can still be considered innovative. This is because even today many Freirean principles are not widely used to guide pedagogical practices. Some of these Freirean principles include: theory in permanent construction, as a function of and at the service of practice; the need to develop another form of pedagogical relationship that is more horizontal and based on dialog; individuals, their knowledge and culture are the main characters; and education as a social project.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE EXPERIENCE

The success and recognition of the Angicos experience generated several other experiences in Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil and abroad. The national and local programs were interrupted by the dictatorship installed by the military coup in April 1964. International projects were then created, probably because of Paulo Freire's exile.

Since the beginning, the contract with the Rio Grande do Norte State Education Office called for the realization of new adult reading and writing classes in the interior of the state (for the municipalities of Caicó, Mossoró, Macau) and in Natal. They were implemented in May 1963 in Mossoró and in the Natal neighborhood of, Quintas (Lyra, 1996). This last case is less known because there is barely any record left of it. Nevertheless, it gave continuity to the Angico experience and as a practical result led to the creation of the Quintas' neighborhood association in September 1963 at the end of the 40-hour literacy classes. The experience was also organized by the SECERN and its Adult Literacy Department, completing the same steps as the process realized in Angicos: the circle coordinators were college

students (many of them came after hearing about Angicos' success); the training was provided by Paulo Freire and his staff from Recife; research was conducted of the socioeconomic profile and of the vocabulary universe; cards were used to discuss the concept of culture; literacy through politicizing; and tests were conducted at the conclusion on reading and politicalization.

In addition to the creation of new classes in the state, directly coordinated by Paulo Freire and his team, Freirean proposals influenced another famous educational movement in Rio Grande do Norte: the "You can also learn to read barefoot" campaign. At the beginning, this adult literacy campaign was inspired by Freire's ideas in an attempt to create a process that led to questioning and not only a contemplation of reality. It also began with word surveys and with the perspective of the student as a knowing subject. Professor Maria Diva de Lucena, the campaign co-coordinator, went to Recife to conduct a class in the Popular Culture Movement (MCP), with the idea of creating a text book like the one used by this movement, which would include the words most used in Natal. There was a Freirean inspiration on the word survey, but it did not use the same literacy method as that used in Angicos, where there was no text book and it did not break the phonemes as was done in Angicos.

With the arrival of Paulo Freire for the Angicos' experiment, his influence on the "One can also learn how to read barefoot" campaign grew and became more visible in a particular way: the training course that Paulo Freire gave in Natal to prepare the coordinators for the literacy process in Angicos had the participation of one of the *barefoot* campaign teachers and after that, culture circles were created for the campaign in the Rocas and Nova Descoberta neighborhoods in 1963. These culture circles had 30 students. Each over 30 years-old and were held from Monday to Friday night for approximately one hour. Professor José Má Azevedo, who took part in this training given by Paulo Freire and who was a coordinator of the culture circle work in Natal, talked to us about it:

[...] actually we called it a culture circle because it wasn't exactly a reading class, it was something broader where we discussed a few issues. Of course we had the moment for learning the language itself, for reading, writing, etc., but we had those other activities as well. (Azevedo, 2011).

On a national level experiences were realized or only begun in Sergipe, Brasília and Rio de Janeiro, and many informal ones were practiced in Goiás, Minas Gerais and São Paulo. Paulo Freire was invited to join the staff of the Ministry of Education (MEC) and to develop a National Literacy Plan, which was approved in January 1964. Before it was approved, culture circles were implemented in the *satellite* cities around Brasília as an experiment, for which new materials and slides with different generative words than those used in Angicos. According to Fávero (2000), the National Plan would begin to be put in practice in the Baixada Fluminense region of Rio de Janeiro and the method's first step (the survey) took place in late 1963. But the work of the circles was impeded by the military coup. One of the first acts of the dictatorship was to terminate the National Literacy Plan.

In Sergipe, a small group that participated in Angicos was invited by D. Nivaldo Monte, a bishop from Natal who was transferred to Aracaju, and in March 1964 began the approach with the community, including the word survey. But one morning they were surprised by the news that "the 'revolution' was in the streets" (Cavalcante, P., 2013) and that they should leave the city.

Valquíria Silva, in her speech we that mentioned above, quoted Paulo Freire from an interview he gave in 1993 that may summarize both the scope and importance of the Angicos experience for himself and the world: "Angicos did not change the world, but it left a mark. In the near future, Angicos will be understood as the point of transformation in Brazilian education. It is where I experienced my learning of the relation of theory and practice that would change my professional path" (Freire, 1993 *apud* Silva, 2013, p. 9).

To conclude our contribution to this educational experience that enchants and intrigues until today, and thinking of its importance for us at the Nucleus for History and Memory, we believe that the words enunciated here find voices in many other researchers and educators that have tried, in one way or another, and just like us, to get close to "40 hours in Angicos", and with them learn and problematize its knowledge and practice. To return to the experiment, 50 years later, allows imprinting on our time, the marks of that experience that inspired other educational readings, practices, desires, perspectives and sayings. There is no doubt that 50 years later the experiment in Angicos is still a living memory that can contribute to the epistemological, political, and pedagogical status of EJA and popular education.

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