

ARTICLE

Horizons Project — relationship between cultural capital, in the sense of Bourdieu, and school failure

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ABSTRACT

This article is a result of research conducted with public school students in the community of Maré, in the city of Rio de Janeiro, from August 2014 to December 2016. The selected students had a school record of low grades and school failure; most of whom with age-grade lag. The research started from the hypothesis that the approach to the students, by engaging them in cultural activities, valued in the educational environment, could lead them to improve their school performance. The participant methodology allowed the interaction between the project team and the students, so that it was possible to confirm the research hypothesis during the work, as the students were participating in the cultural activities and reflecting on them. The results pointed to the close connection between the “consumption” of cultural activities and the ability to interact with the book contents, necessary to build a citizenship of access to cultural goods valued by the school.

KEYWORDS

basic education; Bourdieu; capital cultural.

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PROJETO HORIZONTES – RELAÇÃO ENTRE CAPITAL CULTURAL, NA ACEPÇÃO DE BOURDIEU, E O FRACASSO ESCOLAR

RESUMO

Este artigo é resultado de pesquisa realizada com alunos de escola pública na comunidade da Maré, na cidade do Rio de Janeiro, de agosto de 2014 a dezembro de 2016. Os alunos selecionados possuíam histórico de notas baixas e repetência, quase todos com defasagem idade-série. A pesquisa partiu da hipótese de que a intervenção com os discentes, por meio do oferecimento de atividades culturais, valorizadas no universo educacional, poderia levá-los a melhorar o desempenho. A metodologia participante permitiu a interação entre a equipe do projeto e os educandos, de modo que se pôde confirmar a hipótese de pesquisa no decorrer do trabalho, à mediada que os alunos iam participando das atividades culturais e refletindo sobre elas. Os resultados apontaram para a estreita ligação entre o “consumo” de atividades culturais e a capacidade de interagir com os conteúdos livrescos, julgando necessária a construção de uma cidadania do acesso aos bens culturais valorizados pela escola.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

educação básica; Bourdieu; capital cultural.

PROYECTO HORIZONTES – RELACIÓN ENTRE CAPITAL CULTURAL, EN LA ACEPCACIÓN DE BOURDIEU, Y EL FRACASO ESCOLAR

RESUMEN

Este artículo es el resultado de una investigación realizada con estudiantes de escuelas públicas, en la comunidad de Maré, en la ciudad de Río de Janeiro, desde agosto de 2014 hasta diciembre de 2016. Los estudiantes seleccionados tenían antecedentes de bajas calificaciones y repetición; casi todos con un retraso de series de edad. La investigación partió de la hipótesis de que la intervención con los estudiantes, al ofrecer actividades culturales, valoradas en el universo educativo, podría llevarlos a mejorar su rendimiento. La metodología participante permitió la interacción entre el equipo del proyecto y los estudiantes, de modo que fue posible confirmar la hipótesis de investigación en el curso del trabajo, en la medida en que los estudiantes participaban en actividades culturales y reflexionaban sobre ellas. Los resultados apuntaron al estrecho vínculo entre el “consumo” de actividades culturales y la capacidad de interactuar con el contenido del libro, y que es necesario construir una ciudadanía de acceso a los bienes culturales valorados por la escuela.

PALABRAS CLAVE

educación básica; Bourdieu; capital cultural.

INTRODUCTION

Some studies indicate that the so-called “school failure” is related to the less favored social classes. Such thinking is based on the fact that the school, as it is organized, disciplinarily and conceptually, must meet the requirements of a class with different cultural accumulations from the experiences of families whose children attend public schools, located in *favelas* or in peripheral areas of severe poverty.

Brazilian government assessment mechanisms, such as the Basic Education Development Index (*Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica* — IDEB) — which establishes biennial quality goals and point out learners’ serious reading comprehension problems — are translated into the inability to mobilize accumulated knowledge in the various areas and disciplines to dialogue competently with the text. The difficulty students of popular classes have in articulating knowledge, retrieving non-explicit information, making inferences, establishing relationships between texts, phenomena and circumstances, in our hypothesis, is related to the low accumulation of cultural capital required by the school, shaped and improved from the experiences of the favored classes. According to Bourdieu’s thought (2000), these classes (the nobility, at the time of the monarchy, and the bourgeoisie, after the French and Industrial Revolution) as well as sectors closest to them (the so-called middle class), accumulated a certain kind of cultural capital throughout history, on whose axiology the school system underlies.

This article is a result of a research entitled *Projeto Horizontes — relação entre capital cultural, na acepção de Bourdieu, e o chamado fracasso escolar* (Horizons Project — relationship between cultural capital, in the sense of Bourdieu, and the school failure), linked to the Postgraduate Program in Public Policy and Human Formation of the Rio de Janeiro State University (*Programa de Pós-Graduação em Políticas Públicas e Formação Humana da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro* — PPFH-UERJ). The research was conducted with students of a public school, located in the community of Maré, Rio de Janeiro and is organized in three parts: in the first one, the thought of Pierre Bourdieu, theorist on whom the research was based, is brought to light. In the second part, the project activities, the accomplishments, as well as the difficulties are reported, and in the third, the analysis and discussion of the achieved results.

BOURDIEU AND THE THEORY OF CULTURAL CAPITAL

Bourdieu’s (2000) conceptualization of cultural capital borrows from the Marxist thinking on capital accumulation. The author argues that it is the capital that establishes the rules of social life, making that exchanges are not like a “game of chance” and that the scientific-economic concept of capital is an invention of capitalism, which reduces the universe of social relations of exchange to mere commodification.

This sociologist also states that economic theory brings interest back to economic capital by treating all other forms of relations, i.e., non-economic ones, as unappealing. As a result, “the birth of a general science of the economics of practices

that treats mercantile exchange as a particular case between the various possible forms of social exchange” was avoided (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 134, our translation).

Bourdieu (1979) sees the social space as a field of struggle, where agents (individuals and groups) develop strategies that allow them to maintain or improve their social position. “These strategies are related to the different types of capital. Economic capital, in the form of different factors of production (land, factories, labor) and the set of economic assets (money, wealth, material goods)”, is accumulated, reproduced and expanded through specific strategies of economic investment and others related to cultural investments and the attainment or maintenance of social relationships that may enable the establishment of economically useful links in the short and long term (Bonamino *et al.*, 2010, p. 488, our translation).

It was certainly by thinking of these dynamics of power that Bourdieu established a relationship between the accumulation of wealth of economic value and the “cultural wealth” developed by human genius over time. As the history and the symbolic-cultural goods valued by the school are those preserved (with few variations) by the winners through the ages (Benjamin, 1989) and if the school is “culturally” based on them, reproducing them; they are a sort of symbolic “institutions”, regarded as “true” and legitimizing the vision that underlies them.

The Weberian conceptualization of social capital (such as honor, social prestige, and power) reread by Bourdieu:

is sympathetic of his formulations about durable dispositions, such as the *habitus* (another concept by the author) that emphasizes the dimension of past learning that tends to shape and guide the actions of the agents. The theorization, by the agents, of social values, norms, and principles ensures the adequacy between the actions of the subject and the objective reality of society as a whole. (Bonamino *et al.*, 2010, p. 490, our translation)

The notion of cultural capital, the fundamental concept in this work, according to Bourdieu (1979, p. 3-6), is imposed, first, as an indispensable hypothesis to account for the inequality of school performance of children from different social classes.

The author argues that the economists’ questions about “aptitude” for studies and the investment in them prove that they ignore that “aptitude” or “gift” are also products of an investment in time and in cultural capital. Hence, they can only question regarding the profitability of education expenses for society as a whole or the contribution that education brings to national productivity (Bourdieu, 1979).

According to Bourdieu (2000), cultural capital can fall into three categories. In an internalized or embodied state, that is, in form and durable dispositions in a family or group of individuals; in an objectified state, in the form of cultural assets, pictures, books, dictionaries, tools or machines, which are the result of intellectual disputes, theories, and their critiques; and finally, in an institutionalized state, which is a “form of objectification that must be considered apart because, as we will see in the case of the educational degrees/diplomas, it confers entirely original properties

to the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 136, our translation).

Bourdieu also shows that cultural capital becomes economic capital, because in today’s world everything has the potential for commodity and it is institutionalized in the form of degrees/diplomas, without which there are difficulties in accessing more prominent positions and other capitals, such as the economic and the social ones.

For this reason, even in line with Bourdieu, social capital is never independent of the economic and cultural capitals of a particular individual or of all related individuals (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 150).

Reflection on the symbolic is also very core to Pierre Bourdieu, who argues that there are in our class society symbolic battles that have been won, especially by those who hold the forms of capital society it deals with and impose themselves as the constructing power of the world. A class for him means: “sets of agents who occupy similar positions and who, placed under similar conditions, and subject to similar conditioning, in all likelihood have similar attitudes and interests, hence similar practices and positions” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 136, our translation).

Concerning the symbolic, Bourdieu (2000, p. 124, our translation) states:

what is in play in symbolic battles is the imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world and of its divisions, these are the symbolic power as constructive power of the world. [...] the power to incorporate and inculcate the principles of reality construction.

As well as keeping the established as unique as possible and, in particular, preserving the principle of union and separation and dissociation in which the social world works, such as the usual classifications of themes such as “gender, age, ethnicity, region or nation, this is, essentially the power over the words used to describe the groups, the institutions that represent them” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 124, our translation).

Wacquant (2013, p. 111), reflecting on the distinction, theorized by Bourdieu, states that even refusing to admit that differences exist only because agents believe or make them believe they exist, it must be admitted that objective differences, inscribed in the material properties and the differential profits they bring are distinctions recognized in and through the representations they generate and that make them the agents.

Any recognized difference, accepted as legitimate, even according to the thinking of Wacquant (2013) therefore functions as a symbolic capital that obtains a profit of distinction and only exists in the relation between distinct and distinctive properties such as correct physical body, language, clothing, furniture

and individuals or groups endowed with schemes of perception and appreciation that predispose them to recognize (in the double sense of the term) these properties, i.e., to institute them as expressive styles, transformed and

unrecognizable forms of positions in power relations. (Wacquant, 2013, p. 111, our translation)

Being the school a reproducer and a social order (which ends up serving the purposes of conservation of the economic order), it reproduces the “aesthetic sense as a sense of distinction” (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 58, our translation). Thus, aesthetic disposition is the dimension of a distant and secure relationship with the world and with others that presupposes objective safety and distance. The aesthetic sense is also, still following the theorist, the distinctive expression of a privileged position in the social space, whose distinctive value is objectively determined in relation to expressions engendered from different conditions.

The aesthetic disposition, like all kinds of taste, unites and separates: being the product of the conditioning associated with a particular class of conditions of existence. Tastes (manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference. It is no coincidence that, when forced to justify themselves, they assert themselves in a totally negative way, by the refusal opposite to other tastes (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 58). The theorist adds that in “matters of taste, more than in any other respect, all determination and denial and, undoubtedly, tastes are, first of all aversion, made up of horror or visceral intolerance (‘the urge to vomit’), to other tastes, to the tastes of others” (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 56, our translation).

THE RESEARCH AND THE RESEARCH GROUP

This research was guided by the participant research paths. To address the themes and results of this work we were grounded by the theoretical-methodological line of action research, studied by Thiollent (2008, p. 14), who claims that this modality of social research conceived and carried out in “close association with an action or the resolution of a collective problem and in which researchers and participants — representative of the reality situation to be investigated — are involved in a cooperative and participatory manner”.

The research started from the hypothesis that the intervention with the selected students, through the offer of several cultural activities, which make up the universe of books, disciplines and the school’s dominant thinking, could lead to the students’ performance improvement in all the school subjects related to the curriculum structure of the first grade of high school.

The students selected for the project, all in the first grade of high school, had a history of low grades and failure; almost all of them lagging between the age range-school grade. As we began working at school, we soon realized that the initial planning, prepared in external meetings, would undergo major modifications, because the demands presented by the students encouraged reflections and reformulations.

THE PROJECT STUDENT GROUP

The student group was initially formed by 14 students in their first grade of morning shift high school (class 101) — all of whom residents of community of

Maré. It was decided to select only 14 students exactly to make possible the proposal of what was called “tours”, once that this number would fit in the capacity of a van. An important objective of the project was to provide students with knowledge of cultural spaces outside the school and the community they belonged to, which would imply safe group displacements.

Of the 14 students, 6 were girls and 8 boys. By the end of the project, in 2016, there were 10 students, 4 girls and 6 boys. The names of the 10 students who remained in the project until the end will be preserved; when referred to, they will be named students A, B, C, D (girls); E, F, G, H, I, J (boys). Chart 1 presents the profile of students and their families.

Chart 1 – The profile of students and their families.

Students	Age	Mother's education	Responsible (with whom they live)	Economic activities developed by students outside school hours
A	14	Incomplete elementary school	father and mother	Taking care of the house so as the mother could work
B	15	High School	mother	Taking care of the little sister so as the mom could work
C	15	Incomplete elementary school	mother	Working as a manicure
D	15	Incomplete elementary school	mother	Working as a saleswoman in a haberdashery
E	16	Incomplete elementary school	mother	Working in a (car) workshop
F	15	Incomplete elementary school	mother	Making chocolate truffles (<i>brigadeiros</i>) to be sold
G	14	Incomplete elementary school	grandmother	Working at grandma's stand
H	15	Incomplete elementary school	mother	Young apprentice
I	15	Incomplete elementary school	mother	Working as a bill collector in a <i>Kombi</i>
J	15	Incomplete elementary school	brother	Working in a (car) workshop

Source: Research database.
Elaboration of the authors.

The father is almost always absent in the lives of these young people. Except for A, G, and J, students lived only with their mothers. Student J lived with his brother in a rented room in the community, while G lived with his grandmother because his mother had been involved with a drug dealer and was on the run.

Of the 10 students, only student B's mother had completed high school. The others, like G's grandmother, did not finish elementary school. Student J did

not like to talk about his family or his mother. He was, in fact, the poorest one, his uniform was rumpled and grimy and his sneakers very worn and dirty. Virtually, all the other students were in clean and well-groomed uniforms.

Almost everyone did some activity to earn money. This made it difficult to schedule the outside activities, which often fell outside the day of the meetings, which took place on tuesdays. Student J worked in a car workshop in the community after class. Student E, the oldest one, aged 16 years old, also worked with his uncle in a car workshop. Student H was a young apprentice at McDonald's in Bonsucesso, a district outside the community; student G took care of his grandmother's stand,¹ student F made chocolate truffles (*brigadeiros*) to be sold, and student I worked as a bill collector in a kombi, also from a relative, who transported people from the community to downtown Bonsucesso. Student A, whose mother had completed high school and worked in a mall as a clothing store saleswoman, helped her mother with housework. Student D worked in a haberdashery in the community, student B took care of her little sister (a baby) so as her mother could work, and student C did manicure work. 90% of the students who remained until the end of the project were black. 90% of them also attended, together with their mothers, some evangelical church services in the community.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The first part of the project consisted, as provided in the schedule, of organizing the research team itself — made up of a postdoctoral student, a doctoral student and a PPFH master student — visiting the school, meeting with the school principal, defining the group of students who fit the proposal, and also preparing letters to the school so that the project could be officialized with the Secretariat of Education.

In this very first moment, external activities were planned, which required research on free cultural activities that were taking place in the city of Rio de Janeiro, as the project had no direct financial support. Also, at this first moment, a set of texts was selected to be discussed as well as some films and documentaries so that the students could watch and discuss.

A total of 14 students were selected according to grade-age criteria, but also taking into consideration their learning difficulties and school failure records. All this part related to the “selection” of the students was carried out with the support of the school principal.

After the group was defined, the meetings scheduled for tuesdays at the school began. The first meetings were a kind of territory recognition. The first meeting did not go far. In the second, the now more confident students proposed that we should create a group on WhatsApp. In fact, it took several team meetings to effectively begin the work outside the school space.

1 Stand was a small structure where food was sold in Parque União square in front of Avenida Brasil.

With the creation of the group on WhatsApp, the students suggested that we should create a project brand, an identity. Each one was asked to think of a drawing (a logo) that could symbolize the group's identity. The following week, some students brought drawings and other proposals which did not feature the purpose prominently, but one of them brought a drawing already named: Horizons Project. Everyone really liked it and elected it to be the project's brand.

EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES

VISIT TO THE KANDINSKY EXHIBITION

Visiting the Kandinsky exhibition was our very first out-of-school activity. Consisting of 153 works and objects, as well as the collection of the St. Petersburg Russian State Museum, this exhibition featured works from Russian museums and collections from Germany, Austria, United Kingdom, and France.²

For this visit, we got a 15-seat van with the school principal. There were 12 students and 2 school teachers. The van left the community at 11:40 am, with snacks, fruits and water, provided it would only go back to school after 4pm.

For the first time, the students of the project stepped into Banco do Brasil Cultural Center (*Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil* — CCBB), where the exhibition was held. An imposing building of neoclassical architecture, which according to a ranking of the English publication *The Art Newspaper*, published in April 2014, is the most visited cultural institution in Brazil and the 20th in the world.

Initially, we visited the first floor, showed them the theaters, the café, the bookstore... But they were mesmerized the most by the columns of the building, the skylight, and the proportions of the walls. Only after the space recognition did we head for the queue, which was not short, and went up to the second floor, where the exhibition was organized.

There was a CCBB guide, requested by the project, accompanying the group and presenting the works. He spoke of abstract art, represented by Kandinsky. But the abstraction left the students thoughtful. The guide explained that abstract and figurative art were different from one another. From there, they began to search for something that could be figurative in the works on display... Moment when they found Kandinsky's first impressionist paintings with landscapes and elements of Russian folk art.

Two of the students mentioned they did not understand much of something whose meaning could not be discerned, but that they liked the strong colors of Kandinsky's painting. It was the very first time they had left the community to go to an exhibition; it was the first time they had ever been to a sumptuous space such as the CCBB building; it was also the first time they had come into contact with abstract art.

2 The *Kandinsky* exhibition was curated by Evgenia Petrova and Joseph Kiblitky and was held in Rio de Janeiro from January 28th to March 30th, 2015 (CCBB, 2017).

The exhibition curatorship set up a tent where students were offered augmented reality glasses³ allowing immersion in Kandinsky's works. The students were very interested in carrying out the experiment. However, when the students arrived to take their places in the line, some white ladies felt uncomfortable with their presence. They said they were "cutting the line, they were a horde and they couldn't stay there." We explained: "They were all students of Rio de Janeiro's public school and were not cutting the line, they were all with us, teachers". Students stared at us and lowered their heads. We made sure everyone wore their glasses, looked into the third dimension, and listened to the classical music that went on while the sensory experience of the gaze ran through the works of Kandinsky.

The exhibition promoted an important debate as we returned to school, including prejudice against the *favelados* and black people, a subject that fueled debate in the following weeks. In the week after their visit, after debating issues related to prejudice, because that experience of rejection had hit them, the students did research on art, painting schools and painters in Brazil.

VISIT TO LITTLE AFRICA

Because of the reaction the students had during their visit to the CCBB, of joy on the one hand, to go to such an important place where they could see such colorful and equally important works of art, and also of discrimination, on the other hand, we decided that we should take them to places where they would reflect on the history of racism in Brazil and the root of prejudice against blacks and the poor. For this visit, we were able to rent a van through the contribution of project supporters. There were 10 students and 2 school teachers taking part in this activity. We invited a teacher, a specialist in Brazilian History, to accompany us and hence provide us with information about such important historical sites.

The visit began at the Valongo Wharf (*Cais do Valongo*),⁴ also called the Empress Wharf (*Cais da Imperatriz*),⁵ where the history teacher presented an open-air lecture on the history of slavery and slave trade to Brazil. They could see the large "warehouse" where slaves were exposed for sale and also the area called New Blacks Cemetery (*Cemitério dos Pretos Novos*),⁶ where slaves who died upon

3 Kandinsky's dream was that people could come into his paintings and feel the painting like a song. A mobile app was developed specifically for this. The phone is attached to augmented reality glasses, and floor-to-ceiling and side-to-side, only Kandinsky's drawings can be seen (O Globo, 2014).

4 Short form of long valley (quay). Documentary records report that Rio de Janeiro, in the 19th century, was the main port of entry for Africans to be enslaved in the Americas (Lima, Sene e Souza, 2016, p. 301-302).

5 The quay ended when the transatlantic slave trade was banned, but in 1843 it was remodeled to receive princess Tereza Cristina de Bourbon, bride of D. Pedro II (Janelas Abertas, 2018). Available at: <https://janelasabertas.com/2017/04/19/pequena-africa-rio-de-janeiro/>. Access on: Feb. 13, 2018.

6 After seven months of excavation, the first whole skeleton was found in the *Cemitério dos Pretos Novos*, an archaeological site discovered in 1996 in the port region of Rio de Janeiro (Nitahara, 2017, p. 1).

arrival were thrown. The place is considered one of the largest slave cemeteries in the Americas, closed in 1831 and covered by various buildings. In 1996, the space was rediscovered and today there is the New Black Research and Memory Institute (*Instituto de Pesquisa e Memória dos Pretos Novos* — IPN).

Then the students went to visit the place called at Conceição Hill (*Pedra do Saí*).⁷ The history teacher, in each space, went on explaining the history, showing the specificities, asking questions for students to think about slavery and its consequences for the Brazilian society. An interesting fact is that the school teachers who accompanied us were equally surprised by the history that the teacher was revealing to the students of the project.

VISIT TO THE RIO 450 YEARS EXHIBITION

Housed at the Institute Moreira Salles (*Instituto Moreira Salles* — IMS), as part of the special program dedicated to the 450 years of the city of Rio de Janeiro, the *Rio 450* years exhibition was within the scope of the project, which was to provide students with greater knowledge about the city of Rio de Janeiro through photography.

During the visit, a female photographer, also a participant in the project, was chronologically explaining the history of photography in Rio de Janeiro and the history of the city itself through photography. Interestingly, the revelations of the exhibition made students very surprised by the images of historical and well-known landscapes of the city, such as images of the Lapa Arches (*Arcos da Lapa*), the National Library (*Biblioteca Nacional*), the Outeiro da Glória (*Outeiro da Glória*), the Flamengo Landfill (*Aterro do Flamengo*), among others.

VISIT TO CONSERVATORIA AND TO THE OLD MANSIONS OF THE COFFEE FARMS

The trip to Conservatória, district of the municipality of Valença in the State of Rio de Janeiro, mobilized the group of students intensely. It was a 4-day trip, which required an efficient and effective organization by the project team and the students as well. First, parental permission was required by signing a document, but also by phone call. It was necessary to mobilize friends to get resources to rent the van and request support from the owners of inns and hotels in the city of Conservatória. As the weather in Conservatória region is usually cold at the time we went there, we had to get warm clothes, for which we count on the sympathizers of the project.

The agenda included classes conducted by the history teacher — a project collaborator — about the coffee cycle in the region, visits to inns, whose buildings were the headquarters of coffee farms; participation in typical parties (soirees); visit to *Quilombo São José*; participation in the traditional June party; participation in the

⁷ It is a large stone with a carved staircase that gives access to Morro da Conceição. The place was a point of sale and exchange of slaves and housed *quilombos* and *candomblé* yards (Janelas Abertas, 2018). Available at: <https://janelasabertas.com/2017/04/19/pequena-africa-rio-de-janeiro/>. Access on: Feb. 13, 2018.

open-air *serestas*, and also in a popular music show. The set of activities undertaken during the visit indelibly marked the life of the group of students.

There was a total of 9 students, 4 girls and 5 boys. It was the first time they had been on a trip. Their feeling was one of happiness. They wanted to “explore the world” outside the community of Maré. The two weeks leading up to the trip were spent on organizing. Everything was explained, even how to pack. Many had no suitcase, which also required getting bags for those who did not.

WEEKLY MEETINGS AND ACTIVITIES

The weekly activities were to accomplish three fundamental purposes of the project: first, to discuss the knowledge, issues, and situations related to the so-called “tours”, which were the activities for the acquisition of cultural capital. Second, to broaden the knowledge acquired (the cultural capital) through films, documentaries, readings, text writing and even some lessons on specific issues such as English and math — disciplines students experienced difficulties in, thus we dedicated some meetings to work on these specific issues. Photography classes were also held in these weekly meetings.

Regarding reading, short narrative texts were also privileged, as well as texts of the journalistic article genre, which enabled reading, discussion, and production of texts, all at the same meeting. Among the narratives, the most discussed were Machado de Assis’s, “Father against mother” (“*Pai contra mãe*”),⁸ Bernardo Honwana’s, “The hands of the blacks” (“*As mãos dos pretos*”),⁹ and João do Rio’s, “The man with the cardboard head” (“*O homem da cabeça de papelão*”).¹⁰ Among the newspaper articles, some were very important: Cristovam Buarque’s response to a student in the United States, during a meeting at UN, about the internationalization of the da Amazon,¹¹ and about human rights, taken from the ONUBR (ONU, s/d.) website. Noteworthy is the TEDx by the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adiche, entitled *The danger of a unique story*,¹² presented and discussed more than once.

8 The tale tells the story of a foreman and a runaway slave. See review available at: <https://atraidospelaleitura.wordpress.com/2017/07/17/resenha-pai-contramae-machado-de-assis/>. Access on: Apr. 10, 2018.

9 Mozambican writer and executive director of the Biodiversity Conservation Foundation (BIOFUND). Available at: <http://www.kapulana.com.br/uis-bernardo-honwana/>. Access on: Apr. 14, 2018.

10 A tale, whose main character, Antenor, when changing his head for a cardboard, becomes one of the most illustrious elements of the “Country of the Sun”. View summary available at: <https://www.metodista.br/congressos-cientificos/index.php/CM2011/FAHUDPGE/paper/view/1883>. Access on: Apr. 14, 2018.

11 Cristovam Buarque’s speech at American university. Available at: http://www.portal-brasil.net/reportagem_amazonia.htm. Access on: Feb. 22, 2018.

12 The writer speaks of the danger of a single story. Available at: https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en. Access on: Aug. 10, 2018.

DISCUSSIONS

In order to better explain Bourdieu's (1989, p. 14) conceptualization of symbolic power, which is a power that is exercised without force, but which needs to be recognized by agents, the author also elaborated the concepts of field and *habitus*, which are fundamental for understanding his theory about cultural capital.

Pereira (2015) argues that thinking from the field concept formulated by Bourdieu is thinking relationally. It is to conceive the object or phenomenon in constant relation and movement. The idea of field presupposes confrontation, position taking, struggle, tension, and power. The fields are formed by agents, which can be individuals or institutions, that create the spaces and make them exist by the relationships established there. It is the place that agents occupy in the structure of the field that indicates their position.

At present, the community of Maré, where the school project was carried out, has one of the worst Human Development Indexes (*Índice de Desenvolvimento Humano* — IDH)¹³ in the city of Rio de Janeiro, the 123rd, although today, in 2018, there are schools to serve the entire community.

The education factor, especially in the form of institutionalized capital, by means of educational degrees and diplomas (and the technical and intellectual conditions of dispute over a field or within a field) in allowing access to income improvement, ends up influencing all other IDH indicators.

Obviously, for education to happen in our current model, schools, teachers, administrative staff, libraries, and laboratories are needed. In addition to all documentary apparatus, properly regulated.

Notwithstanding the number of schools in Maré, the families' schooling index is one of the last three in the city of Rio de Janeiro, as well as income and longevity. The community adult literacy rate of 89.46 (IPEA 2013) and the gross attendance rate of 68.76 (IPEA 2013) also corroborate the composition of such an Index.

It is worth noting, however, that the rate of adults considered literate from the IDH survey of 89.46 (IPEA, 2013) is not indicative of accumulated cultural capital, according to Bourdieu, as the research does not inquire whether the person considered literate, as Magda Soares (2004) would say, manages the social use of language (reading and writing) to get work and income, and to exercise their citizenship.

What we are trying to discuss here is that the public school in poor communities has even conferred a title on its students, but they, for the most part, do not leave school with the necessary writing, reading, math, and science skills —

13 The IDH, in short, consists of three pillars considered fundamental: health, education, and income. Health is measured by longevity. Education, measured by the average years of adult education, from 25 years; Income or standard of living is determined by the Gross National Income (GNI), *per capita* expressed in purchasing power parity (PPP), constant, in US dollars, 2005 was the reference year (PNUD, 2016).

sufficient to grow and improve their lives. Indeed, the quality of teaching has not been sufficient to fill students' cultural capital gaps.

The fact that there are schools in Maré, some of which only built in the last 10 years, is not enough to transmit cultural capital to students, due to a number of factors, including low schooling of families and violence, among others.

Regarding the low schooling of families, Almeida (2007) informs that Brazil presents a panorama of extremely high educational (school-type) inequality, even when compared to countries with close (and in some cases lower) per capita income. Also, that parents' schooling is among the characteristics of families that are significantly related to school performance and, therefore, directly associated with educational inequality.

Along with the visits and discussions of texts also came awareness of each other's identity and what each one wanted for themselves and their families. The causes of prejudice against them were also becoming clear. In the group, the mothers were breadwinners and the fathers were figures that did not exist in the lives of these adolescents.

One case to be highlighted is that of student E, who, after two semesters of participation in the project, realized that he should look for a school outside Maré, "a better school", "on the asphalt", exactly to learn things he began to realize that were very important in the context of professional advancement and labor market status. "A school where there was no shortage of math teachers" or classes cancelled because of shootings between traffickers and the police. And that is how he got in the registration line and ran for a place at a school outside the community, a school with better facilities. As soon as he got a place at the school, he told the project team that he would like to continue, that he would come to the weekly meetings and would go on the cultural visits. Obviously, we wanted him to continue participating and so he did it intensely.

In early 2016, the high school occupation movement in Sao Paulo¹⁴ eventually arrived in Rio de Janeiro, and the first school occupied was the one to which student E had moved; and there, he decided to participate in the movement.

As mentioned before, student J lived with his brother in a small room, was the poorest one — compared to the other students — and had a lot of difficulty in Mathematics and English, but soon realized that without these subjects he could not go far, so he also sought to leave the community school due to the class cancellations caused by the shootings.

In the specific case of the school in which the project was being developed, during the time we were there, we often had to cancel activities because of the shootings between the police and drug dealers. The students' concern for our safety made them tell us, through the group created on WhatsApp, when we could enter the community.

14 Movement to prevent the school reorganization proposed by governor Geraldo Alkmin, which would close 94 schools in São Paulo (Nardine, 2016).

Police action leaves more than 4,000 students without classes in Rio communities. From Agência Brasil, on 09/09/2015. Students could not go to school due to the death of Cristian Soares Andrade, a 13-year-old teenager, during a Civil and Military police operation in the community. [...] The State Department of Education reports that [school] [...], in community of Maré, had cancelled its activities this Wednesday morning. (Agência Brasil, 2015, our translation)

There is no way to think about boys and girls who participate in the Horizons Project without bearing in mind the quality of the public school or the economic situation of the families living in the communities, whose children attend such a school. Maré's IDH shows that Bourdieu's theorizations about education and the forms of capital are correct. And that is why the notion of class that is core to him is also present in our reflections on the Maré Horizons Project outcomes.

There were students and teachers feeling ill due to the hot weather. The rooms were not suitable and were not air-conditioned. Following our claim, the director along with the deputy directors quickly addressed the issue. It was then we realized (we could go further). [...] I listened, saw, and lived and could discuss the problems of [school] Brazil. I could see that Brazil certainly needs education, health, and employment and good wages for those who work. And today I have this, the Horizons Project, as a useful past for my personal life. (Student E, 2016, our translation)

Student E's words, sent by WhatsApp, are very interesting because they make it clear that, for him, the struggle for a better school was fundamental. The knowledge acquired or shared in the Horizons Project led him to a political action in favor of the school. But the very movement to leave the community and look for another school already demonstrates that the discomfort of the *favela* and black "etiquette" (which made student E and also the whole group afraid to leave Maré) has been overcome. His interest in leaving the community school was mainly to learn Mathematics, which he had learned to detest — because when there was a teacher and he was taught, he could not understand the reasons why he should learn that content.

But to understand the role that school subjects play, or even to criticize their methods, it is necessary to possess cultural capital, but most families of the students in the communities do not have either the incorporated (transmitted through the family) or the objectified (received through acquired cultural goods), nor the institutionalized (effected through titles), which demands that families have a bookish education.

According to Bonamino *et al.* (2010), as cultural capital in general is realized in the form of durable dispositions, having as its main constitutive elements the tastes, the mastery of educated language and information about the school world, it demands a work of appropriation and assimilation, and its internalization requires long-term investments.

In the course of the research, it became clearer that in order to understand the “plot” of why the children of poor families (and, at this conjunctural moment, excluded from formal employment) fail to perform favorably in school, it is important to understand the dynamism of “culture” and its relations with what Bourdieu (1989) calls symbolic power, which is power that builds reality and tends to establish order and meaning for the world. It is an almost magical power, as it allows to obtain the equivalent of what would be obtained by force (physical or economic), thanks to the specific effect of mobilization.

The educational institution where the research was undertaken is located in a community, which, according to data from Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* — IBGE) (2010), has 129.7 thousand inhabitants, 26% of whom are children.

Research conducted by the Center for Solidarity Studies and Actions of Maré (CEASM) linked to the Pontifical Catholic University (*Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro* — PUC-Rio), in 2000, and analyzed by Nóbrega Junior (2007, p. 56) also revealed that one third of the population is composed by children aged 0 to 14 years, of which 16% are children aged 0 to 6 years and 14% aged 7 to 14 years. In the continuity of this young population there is another important segment: 30% of Maré residents are between 15 and 25 years old.

Bourdieu (1989) reflects significantly on the concept of symbolic violence, which is the process that makes things happen, but people are unaware of the impact of such a process on them, which explains why it is so difficult to change certain social and cultural patterns. One of the typical characteristics of the dominant group is that it can legitimize its culture as being the best. The one that has symbolic value.

The school culture, rooted in this symbolic legitimation, as Almeida (2007) would say, makes the school organized to treat everyone on equal terms, as if all students had the same cultural accumulation. And in this regard, the school is extremely conservative of the unequal order, because among the students submitted to the pedagogical action of the school are those for whom the school culture is featured — their own social group — that is, the one in which they have been immersed from birth. But for the others, the majority of students, it is a foreign culture, or almost. As a result, Almeida (2007) argues that students without access to the culture valued by the school are, of course, more demanded than the others who have been exposed throughout their school years.

Indeed, the dominant Brazilian school culture is western, White/Caucasian, male, and Judeo-Christian. At school, there is a process of valuing this culture itself, as well as its consumption. And in practice, those who have access to this culture will, consequently, have more cultural capital and access to other scarce resources.

Individuals who have developed a necessary appreciation scheme are the ones who will have access to this type of culture. Thus, cultural capital as *habitus* assists the process of social reproduction. But cultural capital, as Bourdieu (1989) has pointed out, can no longer be just a class subculture but a strategy, an instrument of power. These words of the author fit the reflections of Barbosa (2009). In her study on the sociology of the Brazilian school, she states that the mechanisms of inequality make the school institution a crucial factor in determining students’ social and school des-

tinies, since “the effect of school can, at least in part, reduce the effects of students’ social position on their school performance” (Barbosa, 2009, p. 183, our translation).

The professor is right, because the public school, as a free and democratic institution, has a fundamental role in allowing the access of cultural goods valued by the ruling class, which means the possibility of understanding and consuming the culture of such a class, and therefore, understand and use its logic and its science, which has an impact on the way the individual positions themselves in relation to knowledge, including their strategies of argumentation and reasoning.

The research findings only reinforce what was already known about the importance of the school for what it cannot accomplish, that is, providing cultural capital to the students of poor communities, so that they can compete in the capital market on an equal basis.

The school institution is organized disciplinarily and conceptually, to serve students with accumulations of cultural capital different from the cultural experiences shared by the less favored classes. And that is why the school ends up reproducing the social order, also preserving the economic order.

Similarly, it reproduces its aesthetic sense as a sense of distinction. When the students from the Horizons Project arrived at the CCBB, they knew that they did not belong to the world of the visitors of that space; and only after much discussion did they realize the importance of being there. This experience caused them to ask us to make a T-shirt with the project identification, so that they would not be “tagged” and disrespected in the spaces they would enter.

The aesthetic disposition, according to Bourdieu, unites and separates: even though it is the product of conditioning associated with a particular class, it unites those who are the result of similar conditions, distinguishing them from all others.

The difficulty of learning, articulating knowledge, retrieving non-explicit information, making inferences and establishing relationships between texts, phenomena, and circumstances is related to the low accumulation of cultural capital of the less favored classes, which ends up generating a vicious circle of non-overcoming and a certain social “determinism”, for the impossibility of the public school to see its basic role and to adapt to the reality of the students.

To succeed in Brazil’s school model, it is necessary to have embodied cultural capital, and this type of capital, as the name suggests, is incorporated into the family environment through reading, art, and science, the use of the cultured variety of language, which includes the mastery of a varied vocabulary, travel, among many other possibilities.

Without the capital incorporated by the family, which also does not have it in the objectified and institutionalized form, students from poor communities cannot “understand” the issues brought up by the school, at which time they “fail”. The Horizons Project sought to do what the school could not do, to take students out of the community so that they would know not only the arts of the exhibitions, but also the spaces, the buildings, and the “geometries” of the constructions.

The visits were also fulfilling the role of making them dream of a different future from that of their relatives, the cycle of economic oppression that did not offer them “freedom”, in the light of Amartya Sen (2010), in their discussions on develop-

ment: there is no development without freedom and no individual freedom without education, food or health. Basic elements from which individuals build their “freedom”.

The weekly meetings allowed students to reflect on each “tour”. It allowed them to accumulate knowledge about Photography, Art, and History, to get in touch with English as a communication tool and to understand the importance of Mathematics. It allowed them to reflect on prejudice, racism, drug trafficking, violence, employment, and career. Clearly, there was an accumulation of important cultural capital that mobilized them to study.

Reading the short story “*Pai contra mãe*”, by Machado de Assis, made it possible to write the Student’s C text, which we transcribe below: “From the time of colonization, children of black people are not seen as people, so the others believe they can be kicked, killed and discriminated. There are still a lot of Candinhos, who cannot live without exploiting a black person”.

The reading of the tale “*As mãos dos pretos*”, by the Mozambican writer Bernardo Honwana, triggered a discussion about prejudice against blacks and slum dwellers. This tale tells the curiosity of a pre-adolescent to understand why blacks had white palms. The answer to the question given by the teacher, the priest, the mother, and the grocery store owner, in a white-dominated society in the Mozambican colonial period, led the students to realize how racial prejudice was formed and is formed and how it is structured as an element of symbolic value.

The group’s interest in the history of Brazil, particularly in the colonial period until the abolition of slavery was very interesting. This eventually led to the visit to the Little Africa site and the IPN, as reported previously. But such curiosity also drove the group to attend the history teacher’s classes at a private school outside the community.

The interest in the history of Brazil and slavery led us to organize a visit to the big houses of the coffee barons (today hotels and inns), in the city of Conseratória, in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

Visiting the *Kandinsky* exhibition was very important for all that it meant in the lives of students. The architecture of the CCBB building was much talked about and also the gesture of defending them while standing in line to get their glasses to see the work and listen to classical music in the exhibition. The T-shirt with the symbol of the project — which, in the beginning, was an achievement for them, who did not want to be identified on “tours” as a public school in a favela — became relativized at the end of the Horizons Project’s activities, because they realized they needed to give value to the school, the only way to acquire cultural capital to participate in the disputes for space in a social field.

It is the case of scientific learning, for example, if you do not know calculus, it is difficult to learn engineering, which is grounded in Mathematics. This was noticed by the students of Horizons Project. Two of them wanted to study Engineering and were upset when they realized that the basis is Mathematics.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The degree of investment in school career is linked to the likely return that can be obtained with the degrees, especially in the job market. This return — that

is, the value of the educational diploma — can be high or low; the easier access to it, the greater the tendency to devalue it. This is what Bourdieu calls ‘degree inflation’. Low cultural capital, of course, prevents students from community-based public schools from performing well in official examinations, including admission to the public university and even competing for a University for All Program (*Programa Universidade para Todos* — PROUNI) seat, which also keeps students from being able to continue studies.

Reflection on the concept of institutionalized capital is also important for our findings. It is notorious that the credentials of elementary school teachers in state and municipal public schools have greatly been devalued in the Brazilian degree market. People who are increasingly pursuing degrees also hold less incorporated/embodied and objectified cultural capital. When visiting school students with various spaces, usually one or two school teachers accompanied us. Our concern was that these teachers sometimes knew less than the students and were always very surprised by how much they saw and also asked very obvious questions. Our impression after two years in the public school — living with students, sometimes having lunch with them, and talking with their teachers — is that there is a serious problem also related to teachers’ background and accreditation, but that is not the subject of this research.

This subject, actually, touches our question of students’ cultural capital. It is tangential because one cannot talk about the students’ cultural capital without talking about the teacher’s cultural capital and, obviously, about their way of teaching or reframing certain content for students.

The availability of teachers to participate in the school activities was practically nil. First, because of their workload: from the survey carried out with the school board, 92% of them worked in two public schools, for obvious survival reasons. And several of them also worked in private schools. The vast majority had no specialization. When teachers accompanied the group of students on the project, they would do so during class time.

Secondly, by a kind of teacher-class habitus, each one cloistered in one’s own discipline, with repeated certainties about what they teach — following the Secretariats of Education syllabus, increasingly in need of metrics and indicators. But the school, the subjects, and the metrics, of course, have not been able to “promote” students — especially those from high school, considered the bottleneck of Brazilian education — who, tired of failures and not able to see meaning in school, end up dropping out, most of the time, due to the absence of incorporated cultural capital.

But as Barbosa (2009) would say, it is exactly because of social inequalities that the school institution is an essential factor in determining the students’ social and school destinies. And that was clear to us. Schools, especially those located in poor communities, as fundamental instruments for the promotion of citizenship, must create mechanisms and conditions to provide students with cultural capital, especially those “defended” in the books, arts, and sciences (in short, by the school itself) so that students can develop freely.

The Horizons Project, despite its achievement with a small number of students, shows that it is feasible to act in the sense of working with cultural capital and making students value the school as a means of acquiring “political culture” to change their own lives.

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Received on December 3, 2018

Approved on December 10, 2019

