
TEACHERS NARRATIVE FROM A DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL

NARRATIVAS DE PROFESSORES DE UMA ESCOLA DEMOCRÁTICA

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ABSTRACT

This experience report presents part of a postdoctoral research conducted at Instituto Pandavas, a community elementary school that began its work in the 1970s, based on anthroposophy. In 2013, it became one of the Brazilian democratic schools, using the pedagogy of projects, in an attempt to dilute the separation of students by grade and age, as well as fixed class schedules. For this, the school outlined a pedagogical organization in which students could define the direction of their development, believing in the autonomy, the emancipation of each individual, and a participative management. To understand this context, a narrative research was conducted with the teachers and the pedagogical coordinator of this institution. This report mainly aims to understand the perceptions of teachers and pedagogical coordinator about their the experiences in the Pandavas community school. The narratives showed that, by the assemblies, dialogue, “Education to think, feel, and act,” and participatory practices, it is possible for students to assume their role as social, collective subjects, expanding their ability to read the world, thus problematizing it by a transformative praxis. The teachers’ report allowed us to observe that education for humanization is not only for students, because teachers are also trained in this perspective and can self-realize, expressing their feelings while considering the emotional side of the students in daily school life, in a dialogical process that envisions an education for social transformation.

KEYWORDS: Democratic education. Teacher narratives. Participatory pedagogical practices.

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RESUMO

Este relato de experiência apresenta parte de uma pesquisa de pós-doutorado realizada no Instituto Pandavas, escola comunitária de ensino fundamental que iniciou seu trabalho na década de 1970, baseada na antroposofia. Em 2013, passou a ser uma das escolas democráticas brasileiras, utilizando a pedagogia de projetos, na tentativa de diluir a separação dos alunos por séries/idades, bem como os horários fixos das aulas. Para isso, a escola delineou uma organização pedagógica em que os alunos definem os rumos de seu desenvolvimento, com base na autonomia, na emancipação de cada indivíduo e na gestão democrática. Para compreender esse contexto, realizou-se uma pesquisa narrativa com os professores e a coordenadora pedagógica dessa instituição. O objetivo deste relato é compreender as percepções de professores e coordenadora pedagógica sobre suas experiências na escola comunitária Pandavas. As narrativas mostraram que, por meio das assembleias, do diálogo, da “Educação para pensar, sentir e agir” e das práticas participativas, é possível aos alunos assumir seu papel de sujeitos sociais, coletivos, expandindo sua capacidade de ler o mundo, problematizando-o por meio de uma práxis transformadora. O relato dos professores foi possível permitiu observar que a educação para a humanização não é algo somente para os alunos, pois os professores igualmente são formados nessa perspectiva e podem se autorrealizar, expressando seus sentimentos, ao mesmo tempo em que consideram o lado emocional dos alunos no cotidiano escolar, em um processo dialógico que vislumbra uma educação para a transformação social.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação democrática. Narrativas de professores. Práticas pedagógicas participativas.

RESUMEN

Este informe de experiencia presenta parte de una investigación postdoctoral realizada en el Instituto Pandavas, una escuela primaria comunitaria que comenzó su trabajo en la década de 1970, basada en la antroposofía. En 2013, se convirtió en una de las escuelas democráticas brasileñas, utilizando la pedagogía del proyecto, en un intento por diluir la separación de estudiantes por grado y edad, así como horarios fijos de clase. Para esto, la escuela describió una organización pedagógica en que los estudiantes podían definir la dirección de su desarrollo, creyendo en la autonomía, la emancipación de cada individuo y en la gestión participativa. Para comprender este contexto, se realizó una investigación narrativa con los docentes y el coordinador pedagógico de esta institución. El objetivo principal de este informe es comprender las percepciones de los maestros y el coordinador pedagógico sobre la escuela democrática a partir de la experiencia en la escuela de la comunidad de Pandavas. Las narrativas mostraron que, a través de asambleas, diálogos, "Educación para pensar, sentir y actuar" y prácticas participativas, es posible que los estudiantes asuman su papel como sujetos sociales, colectivos, ampliando su capacidad de leer el mundo, problematizándolo a través de una praxis transformadora. En el informe de los docentes se observó que la educación para la humanización no es solo para los estudiantes, sino que los docentes también están capacitados en esta perspectiva y pueden darse cuenta de sí mismos, expresando sus sentimientos, mientras consideran el lado emocional de los estudiantes en la vida escolar diaria, en un proceso dialógico que contempla una educación para la transformación social.

PALABRAS-CLAVE: Educación democrática. Narrativas de profesores. Práticas pedagógicas participativas.

1 DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION: SOME APPROACHES

If, in fact, the dream that animates us is democratic and solidary, it is not speaking to others, from top to bottom, above all, as if we were the bearers of the truth to be transmitted to others, that we learn to listen, but it is by listening that we learn to talk to them. Only those who listen patiently and critically to others can talk with them, even though in certain conditions they need to speak to them [...] even when, necessarily, they speak against the others' positions or conceptions, they speak to them as listening subjects of their critical speech and not as the object of their speech. Educators who listen learn the difficult lesson of transforming their speech, sometimes necessary to the student, in a talk with them. (FREIRE, 1996, p. 127-128)

The debate about the challenges and obstacles to the realization of a democratic education in our country is recurrent in studies in the educational area, which seek to ensure what was proclaimed in the Federal Constitution of 1988 (CF-1988), by advocating education as a right in article 6 and determining, in article 205, that education as “the right of all and the duty of the State and the family, will be promoted and encouraged with the collaboration of society, aiming at the full development of people, their preparation for the exercise of citizenship, and their qualification for work” (BRASIL, 2001).

The right to education as a premise of citizenship is associated with one of the constitutional principles, also provided for in article 206 of CF-1988, which determines “Democratic management in public education, in the form of law”. This prerogative is reaffirmed in article 9 of the National Education Plan (PNE) 2014-2024, Law no. 13,005/2014, which provides for the approval of “[...] specific laws for its education systems, disciplining the Democratic Management of public education [...]” (BRASIL, 2014).

However, despite the legislation in force and the numerous studies on the importance of the democratic perspective in education, its implementation still occurs slowly in a scenario taken by the mercantile view, expressed by the neoliberal precepts that are embodied in the proposals for the privatization of education and the constant devaluation and precariousness of public education and teaching work.

The democratic construction process is complex and involves many disputes, interests, and contradictions; one must be clear about the limits, recognize the weaknesses without disregarding the achievements, understanding that democratic education is not limited to a law, a project, or a school, but is a permanent process, which changes as the people involved and society also change.

In this text, we will adopt the concept of democracy in its broad sense, as “mediation for the construction and exercise of social freedom, encompassing all the means and efforts that are used to concretize the understanding between groups and people, based on historically constructed values [...]” (PARO, 2001, p. 34). Thus, the democratic relationship involves relationships between groups and individuals and takes place in the form of “coexistence between subjects who affirm themselves as such” (PARO, 2008, p. 42).

Paulo Freire draws our attention to the authoritarian perspective that marks the history of Brazilian society, based on colonialism and slavery, which promotes our “democratic inexperience” and the dissociation between school and life. He proposes an education integrated to the local and global reality, as opposed to banking education, which promotes the “[...] anti-participation of our students with their reality. Anti-participation of our students in the process of their education. Anti-responsibility to which our students are relegated in the conduction of their own life. Of their own future” (FREIRE, 2002a, p. 13). The anti-democratic character of society is materialized in education by the formation of passive citizens, without criticism, with little encouragement and a taste for knowledge and democracy.

Freire unveils the human dimension of educational practice when he considers that education promotes, in addition to access to cultural goods historically constructed by humanity, the formation of the human being. In his works, he proposes that education provides the formation of more solidary human beings who seek social justice, so that all people have dignified living conditions. He suggests a democratic pedagogy, an education by and for democracy, through dialogue, debate, and participation: “an education for decision, for social and political accountability” (FREIRE, 2011, p. 88). In this same direction, when analyzing Freire’s contribution to education, Licínio Lima (2009, p. 33) highlights that the democratic view adopted by the author is “[...] radical, against all forms of populism and sectarianism, promoting critical and militant activism through which democracy itself is learned, lived, and created, from school to business, from associations to the local community [...]”.

In Freire’s view, education must be democratic and emancipatory, and the role of the school is the integral formation of the human being, in the individual and social dimensions. In this sense, the political-pedagogical project of schools must be guided by education for and by democracy and subsidize the process of democratization of the internal relations of schools and education systems, aiming to contribute to the consolidation of a democratic society with equity.

The school content, in this conception, is human culture in its entirety, it is the historical production of the human being, which is not restricted to information and knowledge, but encompasses values of democratic coexistence by dialogical relations, which serve as an instrument for a human experience in which subjectivity is considered in its fullness, rejecting any relationship of domination that can deny the condition of a subject endowed with wills and freedom of choice (PARO, 2008).

Democracy is a requirement for the common good, in contrast to the individualistic perspective, anchored in competition and in personal interests, which represent the goals of the wealthiest groups, owners of the means of production. According to Michael Apple and James Beane (2001, p. 23):

[...] democracy is not just a theory of personal interest that gives people permission to try to achieve their own goals at the expense of others; the common good is a central feature of democracy. For this reason, democratic school student communities are marked by an emphasis on cooperation and collaboration rather than competition. People see their interests in others and steps are taken to encourage young people to improve the life of the community by helping others.

Competition and the valorization of individual capacities in unequal social contexts, without guaranteeing equal opportunities, favors the use of the term “democracy” for non-democratic purposes, for instance giving visibility to meritocracy, which is based on the assumption that it is up to each individual to achieve academic success, disregarding the social conditions of the country and the concrete conditions of schools and teachers to carry out training.

Respect for individual freedoms and capacities must be linked to the guarantee of social rights. Maria Victoria Benevides Soares (2004) highlights the need to fight the naturalization of the idea that only the right to vote exempts economic inequalities. Currently, it is not possible for societies that are not supported by the practice of solidarity to guarantee freedom and equality. Solidarity is a political attribute of citizenship: “the solidarity that naturally must derive from a new political regime, a new economic system – foundations for the creation of radical democracy [...]” (SOARES, 2004, p. 64-65).

The exercise of solidarity with a view to creating new forms of relationships that promote a society with equity and justice must be one of the goals of education. Therefore, the concept of education that supports this text is based on the concepts of democracy and citizenship. It is the vision of emancipatory education, opposed to the concept of education of common sense, which considers the school only as a transmitter of knowledge and information, without any concern with the subjectivity of the student or teacher and their real life conditions, when seeing the teacher as a transmitter of knowledge and information and the student as a receiver. It is a perspective of education that does not contribute to

intellectual emancipation, as stated by Joseph Jacotot³, because, seeing the teacher as the “master explainer,” it does not enable understanding, only stupefies the mind, atrophying the students’ ability to think autonomously and leading them to the false belief of incapacity (RANCIÈRE, 2005).

Apple and Beane (2001, p. 24) alert us to the risks we take when seeking a democratic education, since

[...] the work required to organize and keep a democratic school alive is exhausting and full of conflicts. After all, despite the rhetoric of democracy in our society and the common idea that the democratic way of life is learned from democratic experiences, schools have been remarkably anti-democratic institutions [...].

For Helena Singer (2010), democratic schools represent a resistance to disciplinary devices and constitute spaces where knowledge has not yet been contained by power. “Resistance to control of life by the claim of children’s autonomy over their own bodies, their needs, and their happiness, refusing the application of dominant mechanisms of subjection” (SINGER, 2010, p. 39). Also according to Singer (2010), by causing a rupture with the rigid curricula, the authoritarianism, and the conservatism, democratic schools promote experiences of freedom practices for students. These are schools that for centuries have based their studies on critical awareness to the detriment of memorizing content, on the respectful and democratic relationship between subjects, on ethical principles, and on education for humanization. Thus, we see the urgency to carry out research in these schools and highlight them.

According to Freire’s work, one can define humanization as an ontological process of the being that occurs by a liberating education. It humanizes by enabling human beings to stop being things to become full subjects, aware of themselves and their historical role in society, holding their own voice and their own history under construction. For the author, the human being is unfinished, always in search of being more, in a constant process of humanization (FREIRE, 1992, 1996, 2011).

Based on Freire’s work, one can state that a school that enables the formation of critical and autonomous citizens and that establishes dialogue and participation for a transformative educational practice is a school that humanizes. Only by critical and transformative pedagogical practices one can build a just, ethical, and humanized society. In this perspective, according to Apple and Beane (2001), educators assume a fundamental role for the materialization of a democratic curriculum that represents the different voices of school subjects, reaffirming, by pedagogical practices, the ethical commitment to society.

³ French educator who lived between 1770 and 1840 and criticized traditional teaching. The book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, by Jacques Rancière (2005), presents Jacotot and his ideas about the master-student relationship, the equality of intelligences, and intellectual emancipation.

Educators committed to democracy understand that the sources of inequality at school are likely to be found also in the community [...]. In short, they want democracy on a large scale; the school is only one of the spaces they focus on. This is a crucial point. The educational landscape is polluted by the remnants of failed school reforms, many of which failed because of the social conditions surrounding schools. Only reforms that recognize these conditions and actively fight them have the possibility of lasting success in the lives of children, educators, and communities served by schools. (APPLE; BEANE, 2001, p. 23)

Considering, in general, the aspects of democratic education presented in this introduction, we can say that the foundations of a democratic school are based on the participation of all those involved in the school context and on the permanent articulation with the social movements and struggles for justice, around the reduction of social inequalities. In this direction, this text aims to understand the perceptions of teachers and pedagogical coordinator about their experiences at Instituto Pandavas.

2 THE RESEARCH PATH IN A DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL

This text presents part of a postdoctoral study whose empirical research was carried out at Instituto Pandavas, a community elementary school located in the rural area of the municipality of Monteiro Lobato, in the state of São Paulo. The research field was chosen after a rigorous search for democratic schools.

As it is a community school, the decision-making processes at Instituto Pandavas are carried out by assemblies and meetings with the community. The school has a democratic management in which students, parents, teachers, employees, alumni, and the community decide on the organization of the pedagogical work and on everyday issues, such as food, infrastructure, budget, collective interaction between students, among other issues that arise.

Located in Serra da Mantiqueira, the school was born in the 1970s, by the organization of joint efforts to build the school space. Initially, the pedagogical proposal was based on anthroposophy⁴ and on participatory pedagogical practices and was supported by Associação Palas Athena. In 2011, after the association ceased the support, the school was left without

⁴ According to Rosely Aparecida Romanelli (2015, p. 50), “anthroposophy emerged as a way of observing and understanding the world and people, developed by Rudolf Steiner from 1886 to 1925”. As a method of knowing human beings, nature, and the universe, anthroposophy is a philosophical and mystical doctrine that intends to expand knowledge in almost all areas of human life. In Education, Waldorf Education is a pedagogical approach based on anthroposophy.

funding and, by decision of professionals, students, alumni, and the local community, it started to be financed by the community.

In 2013, from meetings with the network of Brazilian democratic schools, the teachers and the pedagogical coordinator chose to change the pedagogical proposal and inserted the pedagogy of projects, diluting the separation of students by grades and ages and making the schedules more flexible, aiming to value the individuality of the students while stimulating collective work. For this to happen, the school outlined a pedagogical organization in which students defined the directions of their own training path, believing in the autonomy and emancipation of each individual.

Students choose a theme that defines the “research module of the month” (or months); from then on, they receive a research script, which can be developed individually, in pairs, trios, or larger groups, usually composed of students of different ages. They have the autonomy to carry out the research at their own time, defining the right moment for learning. Each module ends with the presentation of an individual or collective work, on a topic chosen by the student, which is related to the module’s theme.

Most of the time, students look for themes that come close to their life experiences or their personal interests. The evaluations are constant, being carried out in the assemblies, in the individual and group self-evaluations, or by other evaluation instruments.

Another powerful mechanism to make participation effective are the assemblies, which are conducted by the students, forming spaces for evaluating the progress of the school, including the pedagogical path implemented in the institution. In this space, teachers seek to maintain a horizontal, non-hierarchical relationship, allowing the students themselves to assume the role of organizing and mediating meetings. The assemblies are highly respected, both by students and teachers, and have become a de facto decision-making space.

The field research at this school lasted one school semester in 2016. Participating observations and interviews were carried out with five teachers and the pedagogical coordinator, who also played the role of teacher. Due to the proximity we had during the research, the teachers chose to use their real names: Daniella Souza de Mendonça, Mara Novello Gerbelli, Nilton Almeida Silva, Silvio Marcello Aquino, and Thiago Guerra Duarte. For the interviews, semi-structured scripts were prepared based on the data obtained during the participant observation. The testimonies were recorded on audio, with the consent of the interviewees, and were later transcribed. After the transcription was carried out, the written interviews were sent to the interviewees so that they could modify them, if they found it necessary. After the approval of the interviewees, we started to analyze them.

We opted for narrative research, which, according to D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly (2011), intends to understand and interpret the human dimensions by narratives of the research subjects' experiences, beyond purely quantifiable data. This is a research that involves lives and stories in movement, both of those researched and of the researcher, and which are expressed narratively, and it is up to the researcher who uses them to (re)construct their meanings. Therefore, for data analysis, one must "think narratively" to understand the narrated experiences, without reducing them. Alessandro Portelli (1997) points out that narratives have value not only regarding their content, but are also rich in nuances, intonations, silences, among other aspects existing in the narrators' speeches. It is important to understand these nuances, as oral sources differ from written ones in that they have the expressive aspects of the speaker. According to the same author, oral sources bring the narrators' subjectivity, their desires, their feelings, their intentions. Thus, Portelli (1997) guided the transcription of the narratives, which took place in the most respectful way possible, maintaining the subjective aspects present during the interview.

Walter Benjamin (1987), in turn, clarifies that narrating would be the art of not reducing events to a single version, preserving the multiple meanings. The narrative makes it possible to create another meaning born of an incomplete narrative. Memory, the principle of the narrative, causes the emergence not of memories driven by a single, linear temporality, but of reminiscences, which break the chronological succession of events and do not order them to give them a single meaning. During the interview, those interviewed use their memory to bring up their narratives. This memory is not passive, it is not just a deposit of facts, but it is composed of resignifications.

Áurea Maria Guimarães (2000) explains that, for Benjamin, to create a memory other than that of those who hold the power is to recall the past. This memory is imaginative, springing from the discontinuity of life, which reopens our past and makes us find the vestiges suffocated by time. It is possible to recover the original meaning of the stories that could not be narrated and eliminate the linear continuity that official History imposes on us. Memories are born from an artisanal terrain, the terrain of lived experiences, thus differing from the historiographic mark built in the time of academic knowledge.

Historiography describes the spectacle of universal, official history, without questioning and discerning the attempts of histories that failed, which lie beneath the "history of the winners". For José Carlos Sebe Bom Meihy (2007), oral history is neither neutral nor distant; its role is to give visibility to groups that cannot be heard and to allow their speeches to be expressed, to serve as a warning, to present demands, and to be instruments of change. Thus, the intention of using narrative research is to know the "history of the defeated"

(BENJAMIN, 1987) or the “history seen from below” (MEIHY, 2007), by their narratives that are still hidden, waiting to be told.

3 TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL FROM THE EXPERIENCE AT INSTITUTO PANDAVAS

The Instituto Pandavas teachers are trained in different areas: Geography, Pedagogy, Civil Engineering, Law, and Languages and Literature. One teacher is a master in Geography and the other teachers participated in several courses in the area of Education and Philosophy. Most of the teachers had left their hometowns to work at Instituto Pandavas and, in the year the research was conducted, they lived near the school, in the rural area of Monteiro Lobato/SP. Their ages range between 27 and 64 years old. They constantly take part in continuing education activities. Weekly meetings and a study are conducted to discuss the main problems of the school and student learning, to improve the methodology used, and to discuss the main theoretical references that support the school’s pedagogical proposal. Annually, the school organizes the “Rumos Abertos Pedagogical Seminar”, with courses and lectures with exponents from the Education area. This event is promoted according to the needs and questions that arise in the school routine at Instituto Pandavas. Likewise, one seeks to strengthen the institution’s bonds with education professionals in the region, researching, in municipal and state schools, themes that correspond to the interests, desires, and needs of the local community.

Some interviewed teachers worked in traditional public and private schools before the experience at Instituto Pandavas and narrated the wear and tear generated by this type of structure. For them, not being able to develop new methodologies with their classes, having to apply standardized assessments, teaching by handouts, and not being able to have an affective bond with students were the reasons that led them to rethink the profession and resign from their positions.

For example, I taught a lot of classes outside, then the other teachers complained that “there is a lot of mess after your class”. I needed to make a circle in the yard to play games, songs, so I was not very well regarded by my colleagues. The board did not bother about it. On the contrary, I received good support from the school board. But I saw teachers hoping not to have classes, the teachers themselves hoping that the power went down, hoping that no students would come that day, because it was the eve of a holiday. I heard a lot about this speech that “there are students who don’t really learn”. I heard that a lot. “There’s no way, this one has no way”. So, living in an environment in which people don’t believe in things is very discouraging. I lived with it a lot. These are the reasons that drove me away. (SILVA, 2016)

According to the testimonies, at Instituto Pandavas, educators found a space to (re)construct teaching, under new perspectives and new pedagogical practices. “It is a place in which everyone respects each other a lot, dialogue is present, people talk quietly, relationships are very affectionate” (MENDONÇA, 2016). Some teachers narrated that, when they entered this democratic school, they began to realize that they were authoritarian in the past and that they weakened the students’ autonomy with their impositions. Only in view of this new reality they stopped to reproduce the traditional teaching models, learned in initial training, in other schools, or in their school trajectory, which did not favor the participation of students in the learning process.

For Maurice Tardif and Danielle Raymond (2000), the constitution of “being a teacher” starts in the pre-professional trajectory. It is in childhood, in the socialization that occurs when these teachers were students, that knowledge about teaching, about the roles of teachers, and about how to teach are constructed. For the author, teachers are professionals who were immersed in their work environment for almost 16 years before starting their work. Such immersion makes the baggage of previous knowledge, representations, beliefs, and practices of how to be a teacher very expressive.

Thus, at Instituto Pandavas, some teachers had a break with traditional models, especially from 2013, when the school adopted the pedagogy of projects and the teachers started to be called “tutors”, to mediate the students’ formative process.

As we have already informed, in the routine of pedagogy of projects, students from the 6th to the 9th grade receive a study guide for a theme, which is called a module, and develop research to find answers regarding the problems presented, encompassing several areas of knowledge. Students can choose to develop these surveys in a group, trio, pairs, or individually, although there is much incentive for them to work collectively. For Freire (1996, p. 32), “there is no teaching without research and research without teaching,” and these researches are developed by students in the library, on computers, and even on their cell phones. According to Apple and Beane (2001, p. 20), democratic schools,

[...] like democracy itself, do not come about by chance. They result from explicit attempts by educators to put into practice the agreements and opportunities that will bring democracy to life [...]. These agreements and opportunities involve two lines of work. One is to create democratic structures and processes through which school life takes place. The other is to create a curriculum that offers democratic experiences to young people.

The teachers' narratives are concerned that the research carried out by the students will bring them closer to reflections on the current society and the community in which they live, stimulating their criticism and breaking with prejudices. It was possible to perceive that the students have actively participated in the learning process, interfering and acting directly in the form of teaching. "If the educational program is dialogical, this means the right that educators-students also have to take part in it, including themes that are not suggested" (FREIRE, 1988, p. 116-117). This conception of education, very different from banking education – in which it is believed that it is possible for one subject to deposit their knowledge and the other to passively receive it –, allows the students to be the subjects of their own formative process and the act of knowing. "Knowledge is created, invented, reinvented, learned. Knowledge is made. The students know to the extent that, learning the profound understanding of the content taught, they learn it. Learning the content involves the apprehension of it" (FREIRE, 2001, p. 120).

For teachers, the school has a very important social role; for this reason, they optimize this role by assemblies, which are the decision-making spaces of the entire school community and students regarding various aspects of the school's daily life and its own development.

I realized that the school has an important social role. Important in the sense of forming active citizens, who can change not the whole society, but the environment in which they live, influencing people, their parents, sometimes family members, neighbors, with values, with attitudes. I think the school is very important in this. So, I see the curriculum today not as a content curriculum, but also as an attitude curriculum. Knowing how to express oneself, knowing when to keep quiet, knowing when to give in. The assemblies greatly optimize and provide this exercise. [...] I think the example is also important. When they see teachers and parents taking part in the joint efforts, painting the walls, entering the cleaning schedules, they value it much more... In other words, there is no job that is more dignified or less dignified. I think this is a learned value and that is part of the curriculum. I don't see the curriculum as only Portuguese, Mathematics, Geography. No, the curriculum is also made up of attitudes, values. This makes a difference and can make people change their worldview and how they fit into society. (SILVA, 2016)

In Professor Nilton Silva's narrative, we clearly see aspects of a democratic education, in which occurs the transition from naive awareness to critical awareness (FREIRE, 2011), enabling the subjects who are inserted in the educational process not only to develop their cognitive aspects, but to build their own story. And this constituted participation, this liberating education, is not only exercised by the students. The younger teachers revealed that, for the first time in their professional trajectory, they had collaborated with the joint construction of a project that was carried out. "Some proposals, some positions, some things that I included in the elaboration, I saw that they were really implemented. So there is this process of identification with the school: a meeting can either distance you completely from what the school group is or include you" (MENDONÇA, 2016). Unfortunately, it is not a

common practice in our Brazilian schools to encourage critical action and participation by school subjects. The teachers, as well as the students, cannot be reduced to mere passive spectators of their reality, being transformed into a “human-object”. The daily praxis of action and reflection must lead people to personal fulfillment, liberation, and the birth of the “human-subject,” who seeks the transformation of reality (FREIRE, 1969).

To this end, for 40 years the school has been developing a project called “Education of thinking, feeling, and acting” (EPSA), which, according to the coordinator, is based on philosophy, spirituality and deals with themes such as human rights; respect for differences; culture of non-violence;

[...] religious, philosophical issues; children’s development issues; interdisciplinary themes; diversity; sexuality. I think EPSA seeks to train students as human beings, not just the intellectual part. This is involved with all the other things that we do and it is also in the teachers. (GERBELLI, 2016)

For Freire (1992), a liberating education, based on a critical humanist vision, is one that sees the integral human being and is not limited to the cognitive dimension. The human being is composed of feelings, beliefs, spirituality, desires, thoughts, and actions that need to be considered in the educational practice. The teachers’ narratives show that, in other schools, the students’ emotional aspects were “something that should not come up in the school environment” (MENDONÇA, 2016). For them, Instituto Pandavas takes the opposite path and encourages the manifestation of the various dimensions of the human being.

I think that what we work on a lot here is the issue of affection. In addition, I feel that children here need to listen less from an adult what they really need to know. They have more autonomy than I had, than the way I was educated in a school. In my time it was total castration, I had to go to school to try to enter the polytechnic or to try to pass the entrance exam. That was basically it, and so many other sides of me were never looked at. I think we do that here. (DUARTE, 2016)

In the same way that the emotional side of students is considered, teachers also have the possibility to express their feelings and emotions. “I think the first great joy I felt here was being able to be loving. Loving, being able to look the students in the eye. To be able to ask, before anything, module, content, to be able to give them a hug and ask: ‘Is everything okay?’” (MENDONÇA, 2016). The pedagogical atmosphere that is established between teacher and student must be marked by dialogue, love, affection, and respect, in all school spaces. Likewise, students and teachers must be considered beings who are in a process of constant becoming, in their ontological vocation of being more.

And since can I look at the students that way, I can look at myself that way too. Because there is no division, as there was in other schools. It is not a wall and the teacher is up there. There is no wall here. So, from the moment I was able to look at the students, with more affection, with more calm, with more serenity, it was a mirror. Because I could see myself as a teacher, as a tutor in that way too. In a more serene way, without pressure, paying attention to other details, that in a room full of 40, 45 students and with that crazy content thing, simply focused on content, I couldn't. So, I became – I have become, haven't I? Because it is a constant process ... – a much better person. Then I don't know if it is the person who is interfering in being a teacher, in being a tutor, or if it is being a tutor, being lighter, that is interfering in the human being, in the person. But it was the first big thing. This light environment, you know? Of love. I felt free, a freedom! I enjoy waking up and going to work. I know I won't have to do just one thing because I need to do it and it doesn't make any sense, you know? It gave my life another meaning, or rather, it gave life meaning. (MENDONÇA, 2016)

For Freire (2002b), dialogue is the basis for the pedagogical practice that takes place between teachers and students. Dialogue understood as the love encounter between men people who, while being mediated by the world, transform and humanize it. And in this relationship with the world, which is not just to exist in it, but to transform it, human beings are gradually becoming aware of themselves and the world in which they live. “While the beings who simply lives are not able to reflect on themselves and to know how to live in the world, the existing subjects reflect on their life, in the very domain of existence, and ask themselves about their relations with the world” (FREIRE, 1982, p. 66). The excerpt from teacher Thiago Duarte's narrative expresses this aspect:

I think the thing is to really work on the humanization of these children. Try not to understand each one, but give security to each one of them to be what they want to be, without suffering, with security, with autonomy, understanding their responsibilities as well. I think that as long as we don't look at this human being who is there, there is no point in using constructivism or anyone who speaks on their behalf, there will be something wrong. Then the practice will come out crooked. (DUARTE, 2016)

In such a way, we see in the teachers' narratives not only the search for recognition of the importance of student participation, but the knowledge of their own world and of their teaching condition and the awareness of themselves. And, as teachers are in the process of professional and subjective development, they seek to conduct pedagogical practice in a coherent way, paying attention to the integral education of students, which leads human beings to “adequately dose their role in the huge range of relationships that life offers, including relationships in the world and with the world, intrapersonal, interpersonal, aesthetic, of gender, ethnicity, and production” (CALADO, 2001, p. 52).

4 FINAL REFLECTIONS

The understanding of the teachers and pedagogical coordinator about the experience at Instituto Pandavas allows us to perceive the power of a school constructed by all subjects. The democratic school has an impact on the pedagogical practice of teachers, by enabling the feeling of being the authors and constructors of their action, promoting in them a feeling of professional and personal satisfaction and, at the same time, the perception of the positive effects on the training of students and relationship with the community.

By the teachers' narratives, it was also possible to get to know a school that found, in the assemblies, in the dialogue, in the "Education to think, feel, and act," and in the participatory practices, instruments to favor the autonomy of the students, for them to act and reflect collectively about the world they live in, problematizing it. In addition, there is the concern of this school with the awakening of curiosity through research and the integral development of human beings in their cognitive, spiritual, aesthetic, ethical, cultural, emotional aspects, among others, which lead to their liberation and fulfillment. This is an education for the humanization of students and also of teachers, who seek their fulfillment by developing innovative practices, by actively participating in school decisions, by expressing their feelings, and by considering students as integral beings.

We believe that this experience narrated by the teachers provides the necessary clues to achieve an education that transforms. By breaking with conservatism, with authoritarianism, with the vision of an inflexible curriculum, Instituto Pandavas shows us the urgent need for our schools to develop the act of thinking critically – to the detriment of the memorization of contents –, of considering differences, and of establish a respectful and democratic relationship in which teachers, students, parents, and the community can actively take part in an education that is liberating.

Thus, these teachers inspire us to get to know an education that, instead of reinforcing competition, reaffirms collectivity, by the group activities that are developed, by the assemblies, by the cooperative games in detriment of competitive ones, among several other actions that there are developed. This is an education that seeks equity and does not reinforce differences as something negative, but sees them as a driving force for the new. It shows us how it is possible, through participatory practices, to educate students who assume their role as social subjects, collective subjects, expanding their capacity to read the world, problematizing it in a transformative praxis. Likewise, it shows us how it is possible to educate students to be citizens qualified to participate in public and political life, performing their "vocation to be more, as an expression of human nature, making themselves in History" (FREIRE, 1996, p 11).

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