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PROMOTING TEACHERS' DIALOGICAL DEVELOPMENT TO FACE PREJUDICES AND UNCERTAINTIES

Luciana Dantas de Paula

Brasília, abril 2024

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ABSTRACT

Teachers face uncertainties in their classroom work, particularly when students ask questions for which they have no ready answer, or when conflicts arise. Although many teachers have been told to avoid controversial topics, in today's polarized world it is not a matter of *if* but *when* they will encounter situations of uncertainty or conflict. This reality heightens tensions in teachers' practices: Should they engage in difficult conversations with students or avoid them? Considering this scenario, the research aimed to identify and analyze possible shifts in teachers' perspectives and positionings regarding how to manage uncertainties in conflict involving prejudices and other sensitive topics, by creating and holding an extension course on conflict resolution in the classroom. Moreover, we aimed to consider the teachers' ideas regarding the implementation of concrete actions and social practices to improve the mitigation of conflicts and controversial issues in their classrooms. To achieve this, a qualitative study was conducted anchored in the theoretical and epistemological foundations of Cultural Psychology and the Dialogical Paradigm in human sciences. Both theoretical stances understand human phenomena as complex, dynamic, and interdependent with culture and context. An eight-week focus group with thirteen Middle and High School teachers was conducted online. The meetings were structured to adapt and change according to participants' contributions and inputs. Three individual interviews were also conducted to gather feedback, understand their experiences and the impact (if any) of the meetings. The rich data set coconstructed in this research was organized into two key axes of analysis: horizontal, providing a broad view of the data across the sessions, and vertical, focusing individual participant analyses. We traced and articulated the movements of the participants in dialogue across the meetings, identifying tensions, contradictions, agreements; and analyzed the nuances of their perspectives and positionings regarding conflicts and uncertainties they faced. Our findings revealed that the primary challenges teachers faced were less connected to teacher-students' interactions and more connected to the kaleidoscope of complex relations that stemmed from macro and meso (society and institutions) levels and poured into the micro level relations they navigate. Fear and uncertainties about possible institutional reprimands, or of losing control of the class were some of the concerns that surfaced. Hypergeneralized cultural messages, institutional constraints, lack of support and training came up as barriers for the teachers to even try to implement dialogical practices in class. This is why, in translating dialogical intentions into practice, we need to emphasize the affective dimension of subjectivity and social interactions. Horizons of possibilities emerged from the collective meaning-making processes during participants' interactions; where indicators of openness were identified, which could bring them out of the overwhelming uncertainty towards a greater engagement with what was possible at each moment. *Shifts* in participants' *perspectives* and *positionings* were also identified, which we interpreted, and propose, as fruitful developmental constructs indicative of micro-processes of change. We conclude by highlighting that, efforts in the direction of cocreating a welcoming Affective-Semiotic Atmosphere-ASA (a construct here proposed), are essential to the development of democratic education. Teachers are more able to navigate uncertainties inherent to pedagogical and dialogical practices when they rely on such constructive atmospheres.

Keywords: Cultural Psychology; dialogic practices; teacher-student interactions; conflict; classroom.

RESUMO

Os professores enfrentam inúmeras incertezas em seu trabalho em sala de aula, principalmente quando os alunos fazem perguntas para as quais não têm resposta ou quando surgem conflitos. Embora muitos professores tenham sido instruídos a evitar tópicos controversos, no mundo polarizado de hoje, não se trata de uma questão de *se*, mas de *quando* encontrarão situações de incerteza ou conflito; cabendo a pergunta: professores devem engajar em conversas difíceis com os alunos ou evitá-las? Considerando esse cenário, a pesquisa teve como objetivo identificar e analisar possíveis mudanças nas perspectivas e posicionamentos dos professores em relação a como navegar incertezas e conflitos envolvendo preconceitos e temas sensíveis, por meio da realização de um curso de extensão sobre conflitos em sala de aula. Para isso, foi realizado um estudo qualitativo ancorado nos fundamentos teóricos e epistemológicos da Psicologia Cultural e do Paradigma Dialógico. Ambas as abordagens entendem os fenômenos humanos como complexos, dinâmicos e interdependentes da cultura e do contexto. Assim, foi realizado um grupo focal de oito semanas com treze professores do ensino fundamental e médio. As reuniões online foram estruturadas para se adaptarem às contribuições dos participantes. Ademais, foram realizadas três entrevistas individuais semi-estruturadas para obter feedback, entender suas experiências e o impacto das reuniões. O rico conjunto de informações coconstruídas nesta pesquisa foi organizado em dois eixos de análise: horizontal, fornecendo uma visão ampla dos dados ao longo das sessões, e vertical, concentrando-se em análises individuais dos participantes. Rastreamos e articulamos os movimentos dos participantes no diálogo durante as reuniões, identificando tensões, contradições e concordâncias; e analisamos as nuances de suas perspectivas e posicionamentos em relação aos conflitos e incertezas que enfrentavam. Os principais desafios dos professores estavam menos ligados às interações professor-aluno e mais ligados ao caleidoscópio de relações complexas dos níveis macro (estrutural e institucional) e que refletiam nas relações de nível micro que eles tinham de navegar. O medo e as incertezas sobre possíveis repreensões institucionais ou a perda do controle da turma foram algumas das preocupações que surgiram. Mensagens culturais hipergeneralizadas, restrições institucionais, falta de apoio e treinamento surgiram como barreiras para os professores para sequer tentar implementar práticas dialógicas em sala de aula. Por essa razão, na tentativa de traduzir as intenções dialógicas em prática, precisamos enfatizar a dimensão afetiva. Horizontes de possibilidades surgiram dos processos coletivos de coconstrução de significados durante as interações dos participantes, nos quais foram identificados indicadores de abertura que poderiam tirá-los de grandes incertezas em direção a uma maior conexão com o que é possível em cada momento. Também foram identificados *shifts* nas *perspectivas* e *posicionamentos* dos participantes, o que interpretamos, e propomos, como construtos frutíferos para a psicologia do desenvolvimento, indicativos de micro-processos de mudança. Concluímos destacando que os esforços na direção da cocriação de uma Atmosfera Afetivo-Semiótica-AAS (construto aqui proposto) acolhedora são essenciais para o desenvolvimento de uma educação democrática. Os professores são mais capazes de lidar com as incertezas inerentes às práticas pedagógicas e dialógicas quando contam com tais atmosferas construtivas.

Palavras-chave: Psicologia Cultural; práticas dialógicas; interações professor-alunos; conflito; sala de aula.

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers' work in the classroom is permeated by uncertainties. This is especially true when students ask questions that teachers have no ready answer to or when conflicts arise. Although many teachers have been told to avoid controversial topics, in today's polarized world, it is not a matter of *if* but *when* they will encounter situations of uncertainty or conflict. This reality heightens tensions in teachers' roles and positionings in the classroom. Teachers ask themselves if they should engage in difficult conversations with students or avoid them altogether. Clifton and Fecho (2018) and Beghetto (2020) mention the impact of situations that trigger uncertainty in the school environment. On the one hand, these situations can provoke discomfort and irritation in teachers who have their lesson planning interrupted. On the other hand, they can promote opportunities to foster human development – of the teachers and their students – as new possibilities for teaching and learning may emerge precisely from the uncertainties.

Clifton and Fecho (2018) and Combs, Park and Fecho (2012) add that situations of uncertainty can bring moments of wobble, which occur when an unexpected action requires a response from someone (in this case, the teacher). The authors emphasize that when something wobbles, such as a car wheel, a porcelain plate or a child's toy, people notice, and this makes them stop to pay attention, consider, and decide on the best way to act in that situation. Educational contexts are permeated by moments of wobble – unpredictable situations that are beyond the control or planning of educators, such as a student's unexpected response, a question they do not know how to answer, and so on. Clifton and Fecho (2018) state that "When some aspect of our world view wobbles, our attention is drawn to it and to the uncertainty manifested there, hopefully to compel some level of reflection and dialogue that will propel us through the uncertainty." (p. 22).

However, that is not always the case. Uncertainty can heighten a feeling of unease, which can lead us to become rigid in our beliefs, values, and actions, as a way of avoiding or defending ourselves from the dangerous uncertainties we face. Beghetto (2020) defines uncertainty as "(...) a present state of not knowing, a future oriented inability to confidently predict what will happen in the future and a potential lack of clarity of how to make sense of past events." (p. 1691). And, we would add, generating doubts about what to do in the present. There is a tendency to want to resolve uncertainty quickly, because it can pose a threat to the system (individual and collective). So much so that, as Beghetto (2020) points out, teachers even tend to make lesson plans that seek to eliminate possibilities of uncertainty, detailing activities minute by minute, preparing interactions with students almost like a rehearsed script to escape the possible chaos that uncertainty may trigger.

Nevertheless, uncertainty is an integral aspect of human experience (Glaveanu, 2020a), and there is no way of planning to avoid it in the school context or in any other aspect of life. It is interesting to note that Combs et al. (2012), who have made significant contributions to psychology and education by studying the issue of uncertainties in schools, did not deeply analyze the power relations in the school context and their interconnectedness with these processes. They have developed theories and concepts that contribute to the development of better educational practices, as they mention systems of domination, but we believe it is vital to consider the asymmetrical quality of power in the relationships that take place at school—between teachers and students, between teachers, between students, between teachers and administration, and so on. It is, therefore, important to understand the nuances and impacts of such power dynamics, especially to support teachers to deal with issues arising from them.

Valsiner (2012) and Toomela (2010) criticize mainstream Psychology for trying hard to prove itself as a science and losing sight of its object of study, i.e., the experience of

human life in its complexity and integrity. Fragmentation, historical blindness and attempts at neutrality are among mainstream Psychology's limitations (Toomela, 2010). It is worth highlighting the premise supported by Vygotsky (1991) that human beings are biologically social, but we become human through processes of internalization and externalization of practices and meanings in our relationships with others and culture. The author states:

> [human beings are] social being[s] and, outside of the relationship with society, would never develop the qualities, the characteristics that are the result of the methodical development of all humanity. (...) The environment is the source of development of these specifically human characteristics and qualities (...), in the sense that it is there that the historically developed characteristics and the peculiarities inherent to the [human being] by virtue of their heredity and organic structure exist (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 90).

For this reason, Valsiner (2012) points out that important questions for Cultural Psychology should be: "how is culture present in human feelings, thoughts and actions? How do human beings guide their own subjectivity through various cultural artifacts?" (p. x). Therefore, when thinking about the processes of human development that take place in the school context, such as those mentioned above, it is necessary to adopt a systemic, sociogenetic and dialogical perspective. That includes in the analysis of this context a more in-depth elaboration on the implications of culture, institutions, and power relations between people.

When we refer to power relations, we align with Foucault's (1979) elaboration of power, not as a fixed condition, or entity located in some person, place, or institution, but as dissolved and entrenched in the social relations established between all these instances, from individuals to institutions. This notion can help us understand the dynamic relations between teachers and students in schools, affecting pedagogical practices. If the teacher is to be

believed as the highest authority in class, responsible for its "control", then the student's (autonomous) participation may be seen to bring an unwelcomed uncertainty (Bohoslavsky, 1997; Kennedy, 2005). Foucault's (1979) notion of power relations dismantles the naturalized idea that some people have power while others do not. The author points out the investigation of the complex dynamics of interactions (and relations) in which power manifests. It often emerges from a continuous play of multiple forces, tensions, and resistances (Foucault, 1979; Chaudhary et al., 2017). Power "is exercised, disputed. And it is not a univocal, unilateral relationship." (Foucault, 1979, p. xv).

Therefore, the dispute, negotiation, and resistance of power relations are not fixed in authority figures; rather, they move between and with people of different identities, social standings, etc. In school's contexts, it especially moves between teachers and students. Hence, an aspect worth emphasizing is the points of tension in this power struggle, which may generate wobbles (uncertainties) leading to ruptures. We believe that Cultural Psychology's approach to human development processes has a lot to contribute to understanding these phenomena, by exploring the emergence of meanings and tensions in people's live trajectories (ontogenesis) (Cabra, 2020) and in moment-to-moment experiences (microgenesis) (Lavelli et al., 2005).

Especially considering the existing tensions in power relations that highlight historical inequalities in our society, which have deepened recently, there have been worldwide movements stemming from actions like *Me Too*[1] and *Black Lives Matter*[2], for example. These

[1] A movement against sexual abuse and harassment of women started by the American activist Tarana Burke. In 2017 the movement grew on social media with the hashtag #metoo as a way of showing the nuances of violence against women in different spaces. It invited women to share on social media platforms situations of harassment and/or abuse that they had experienced or were still experiencing. This initiative showed the significant number of women who suffer this type of situation, still a lot of work with young girls and women was still the focus of Tarana Burke's efforts. Available at: https://metoomvmt.org/

[2] In 2013, following the acquittal of a police officer who was involved in the killing a young black man, the Black Lives Matter movement began. It gained even more strength and visibility in the following years. This movement also had repercussions on social media with the hashtag #blacklivesmatter, and it aimed to protest against police brutality towards Black people. Available at: https://blacklivesmatter.com/

movements have brought to the forefront the debate on the various forms of violence in our society against women, non-white individuals, LGBTQI+ people, among others. The issues raised by these movements are surfacing more frequently across different societal contexts, including educational institutions. Discussions on "the site of speech," (Ribeiro, 2017), systems of domination (hooks, 2010, 2013), decolonization of knowledge (Bhatia, 2018; Mignolo, 2011; Pavón-Cuéllar, 2021) are among a few examples. Broadly speaking, these debates shed light on issues that have been historically neglected, silenced, or excluded.

Social sciences (particularly anthropology and sociology) and philosophy have engaged in such discussions from various perspectives for several decades; however, psychology has not yet diligently participated in debates to construct new knowledge about such topics. In the fields of developmental and educational psychology, there is a significant opportunity for researchers to explore the underlying processes in conflict situations (permeated by tensions and ruptures). Such situations cannot be dissociated from structural and cultural inequalities that pervade social relationships and cultural expectations. Delving deeper into the experience of teachers, of how they navigate such conflicts, has the potential to clarify possible paths for conflict resolutions and fruitful interventions.

Patto (2015) stressed that phenomena we usually individualize, such as students' low performance at school, are actually socially produced. Her extensive research argued that historical inequalities—encompassing racial, class, and gender disparities—along with biases regarding low expectations of students from vulnerable and underprivileged communities, have a profound impact on teachers' pedagogical practices. Patto (2015) reveals a precise connection between historically rooted power relations and how they culminate in the production of academic failure. Research of this nature is of the utmost relevance, yet it presents a significant challenge as it addresses deeply ingrained beliefs and expectations in our social interactions, often invisible to most people.

Hence, some scholars have elaborated on what they refer to as a “hidden curriculum” (Junqueira, 2010; Miskolci, 2016; Silva, 2002). It is characterized by practices, behaviors, and physical spaces that affect students’ learning and development but are, usually, not perceived by educators. This learning goes beyond strict cognitive processes, it involves social relationships, values, beliefs, and prejudices. Relationships between teachers and students, for example, are full of verbal and nonverbal messages that communicate to youths the social atmosphere of that school’s environment as well as the values there prevailing. If the moral values and beliefs that permeate the hidden curriculum are sexist, classist, LGBT-phobic, racist, these values (or prejudices) will tend to be internalized by students (Branco et al., 2012; Madureira, 2007; Madureira & Branco, 2012; Patto, 2015). These values, prejudices, and moral beliefs may, for instance, also underlie and trigger many situations of uncertainty and wobble that occur in classrooms.

Educators aware of these wobble moments, though, can use them as precious opportunities to foster human development and deconstruct prejudices, instead of reinforcing them. Rather than being paralyzed by uncertainties, how can teachers be encouraged to engage in dialogue with their students? Especially, seeing uncertain or sensitive situations as opportunities to promote both their students’ and their own development? The better we understand the nuances and characteristics of these interactions, the better we can implement more effective and democratic educational practices to support teachers in their roles. The present research is an effort in this direction.

In the pages that follow, we present the objectives of the present research, followed by the relevant theoretical foundations that guided our investigation. Subsequently, we present the methodology employed to achieve the objectives, followed by the Results detailing our main findings. Next, we discuss the data constructed considering our theoretical framework, and then present the final remarks. It is our sincere hope that this dissertation

provides valuable insights and stimulates further discussions on the topics of human development, dialogic practices, prejudice deconstruction and conflict resolutions.

OBJECTIVES

General objective: By creating and holding an extension course on conflict resolution in the classroom, we sought to identify and analyze possible shifts in teachers' perspectives and positionings regarding how to manage uncertainties involving power struggles, prejudices, and other sensitive topics. Moreover, we aimed to know the teachers' ideas regarding the implementation of concrete actions and dialogic social practices to improve the handling of conflicts and controversial issues in their classrooms.

Specific Objectives:

1. Analyze possible changes in teachers' perspectives and positionings concerning their practice, beliefs, values, experiences, and expectations relate to navigating coflicts, prejudices, diversity and other sensitive issues with their students.
2. Coconstruct, with teachers, potential ways, strategies, and activities to deal with issues that provoke uncertainty (wobbles) related to interpersonal conflicts, discrimination, and prejudice that may help them navigate through tensions in difficult situations.
3. Evaluate the quality of the experiences lived during the meetings with participants and analyze possible changes in their positionings and practices.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter 1 – The Affective-Semiotic Dimension of Human Development

Subjectivity—our psychic life—is a lived phenomenon.
Human existence involves flesh and bones and our affective abilities
are deeply rooted in our body energy (Salgado, 2007, p. 67).

Bruner (1990) criticized the growing fragmentation of psychology and the risk of losing an internal coherence that would, at least, enable a dialogue between the different areas and perspectives of psychology. Three decades on, this scenario remains largely unchanged, implying that there is still much dispute about what should be studied and how it should be researched in psychological science. Valsiner (2012, 2014, 2019, 2021) has highlighted the difficulty psychology has in explaining the human psyche, given that the study of either the psyche or the mind has resulted in a fragmentation of psychology as a science itself. The ways psychology investigates human phenomena varies a lot in forms and perspectives, depending on the theoretical and epistemological bases of those who produce this knowledge (Bruner, 1990; Valsiner, 2012). And this needs to be analyzed. Therefore, it is important to present and examine the basic principles of Cultural Psychology to understand the theoretical foundations of the present dissertation.

According to Cultural Psychology, culture is not conceived as an entity that determines human development, much less in a linear way. The definition of culture has been extensively explored yet it remains open to ongoing revision and debate. There are various elaborations in psychology on what culture is (Valsiner, 2019). From our perspective, culture is understood as an open, dynamic system within which individuals develop (Vygotsky, 2018). Culture organizes the higher psychological functions typical of human beings (Vygotsky, 2018), and encompasses the symbolic and material dimensions of existence –

such as language, social practices, artifacts, instruments, buildings (architecture), etc—as it acts in meaning-making processes inherent to human development (Valsiner, 2012, 2014).

Therefore, for Cultural Psychology, culture operates and is at work *within* everyone's own psychological processes, and it is not merely an external variable. All people are born into a historically and culturally organized world, which is set before their birth, characterized by relationships permeated by tensions, convergences, and divergences found in families, institutions, and broader social relations. Culture can be collective or personal. *Collective* culture refers to the contexts in which individuals participate and share, throughout their life history, the meanings they internalize, leading to the development of their *personal* (or individual) culture (Valsiner, 2012).

Internalization, however, is not a passive process in which the person simply absorbs aspects of the collective culture but presupposes agency and activity of the person in their relation to culture. As Gillespie and Zittoun (2013) state, "Bodies move within society, accumulating societally patterned experiences, which in turn provide the resources for cultural and fictional experiences" (p. 527). Valsiner (2012) points out that personal culture is made up of intra-psychological tools that create a sense of subjective stability, albeit dynamic, in what are, many times, chaotic scenarios full of uncertainties that can emerge in one's life.

A central point within the perspective of Cultural Psychology is the existence of deeply systemic and interdependent relations between *individuals* and *culture*, which are considered as mutually constitutive (Jaspal et al., 2015). This consists of the opposite view undertaken by mainstream psychological science, which proposes a dichotomous conception of the notions of Subject - Culture, Self - Other, Body - Mind etc. Valsiner (2012, 2014, 2021) and collaborators propose a concept that can integrate the complex aspects of human experience, which is the concept of *inclusive separation* (Salgado, 2007). This concept is

based on the idea that the relation between subject and culture is profoundly interdependent. They are distinct and separate concepts, although they are interconnected in a totality. In other words, culture is constitutive of the subject, organizing human subjective processes; however, it only exists because of the constant construction and reconstruction of it by human beings. Both subject and culture are mutually coconstructed and coconstitutive of each other (Valsiner, 2012, 2014, 2019, 2021)

As a scientific approach, Cultural Psychology is based on two central principles. First, each person's life experience is unique; each specific action and interpretation of events is distinct in terms of their meaning-making processes. Second, it is possible to construct scientific knowledge and generalizations about the processes eminently linked to human development. In essence, by conducting in-depth idiographic qualitative research, it is possible to identify certain general and guiding principles that support the emergence of unique human phenomena (Aveling et al., 2015; Marsico et al., 2015; Salvatore & Valsiner, 2008; Valsiner, 2017), what will be further explored in the Methodology section of this dissertation.

The ongoing effort of Cultural Psychology is not, therefore, to quantify observable behaviors or isolate variables to understand human phenomena. Rather it is to overcome the inherit limitations of a psychology that attempts to universalize and decontextualize human experience (Bruner, 1990; Toomela, 2010). Evidently, this approach is quite challenging, as it invites individuals to tackle the complexity of human phenomena in its wholeness. This includes considering multiple dimensions, such as historical and cultural contexts, power relations, the systemic organization of human development processes, and the singularity of each trajectory, the unique and unpredictable flow of a single life. However, it is a worthy challenge to pursue, and Cultural Psychology scholars are actively exploring and developing

methodologies to analyze the complexity of psychological processes (Aveling et al., 2015; Souza et al., 2008).

In this dissertation, we adopt a semiotic perspective on Cultural Psychology. Semiotic Cultural Psychology emphasizes affective-semiotic processes and focuses on cultural signs and symbols that are central to meaning-making (De Luca Picione et al., 2022; Gillespie & Zittoun, 2013; Lopes de Oliveira et al., in press; Tateo & Marsico, 2021; Valsiner, 2021). Understanding these meaning-making processes is crucial to Cultural Psychology's approach to human development. It is through the social relationships and interactions we establish with our environment—through communication and other cultural practices—that we come to appropriate affective-semiotic systems, which are systems of meanings offered by culture that we actively (re)signify and generate our understanding of ourselves and our context (Bruner, 1990; Valsiner, 2012, 2017).

Thus, Cultural Psychology sees the individual as active and constructive in meaning-making processes. Meaning-making does not occur merely at the levels of cognition and language, but are processes fundamentally permeated by *affectivity* (Abreu et al., 2022; Branco, 2018; Branco et al., 2020; Paula et al., 2023). As Le Breton (2009) states, "Affectivity is mixed with significant events in collective and personal life, implying a system of values put into practice by the individual and an interpretation of the facts according to a moral reference." (p. 118). It is, therefore, important to underline that the processes of constructing meanings are not only semiotic, but *affective-semiotic*. The affective dimension, which permeates human motivations, emotions, feelings, and values, is an indispensable dimension for understanding sense-making processes. For Charles Peirce, for example, it is not possible to construct meanings about something that does not affect the subjects themselves through 'primality' (the affective quality of signs) (Pietarinen, 2015).

Hence, another key assumption of the theory, especially relevant to this dissertation, refers to the powerful affective-semiotic quality of psychological phenomena. Consequently, it is important to discuss these concepts in the following sections to better understand how affectivity, values, and prejudices are systemically interconnected in human development processes.

Values and prejudices: the affective dimension of human phenomena

Prejudice, discrimination and violence are regrettably still prevalent in our society today. In recent years, more specifically, there has been a growing wave of intolerance of differences, polarization of ideas and beliefs, and the formation of groups that lead to the radical separation of people and to hatred for everything perceived as different (Giridharadas, 2022; Tiburi, 2015). Nonetheless, it would be inaccurate to discuss the current escalation of these issues as if it were a new phenomenon. There is nothing new about prejudice, polarization, and hatred of differences in their various levels and manifestations, from micro to macro systemic. On a larger scale, the terrible events that took place during World Wars I and II led to the approval of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, elaborated in 1948 (ONU/UN, 1948). This declaration was the 1st global scale attempt to safeguard human rights and dignity in the face of the magnitude of the violence experienced in the two wars.

Silva (2005), addressing prejudice in education, critiques the idea of an emancipatory education rooted in Enlightenment philosophy. He argues that blindly trusting in emancipation through reason is risky, as the socially valued rationale can be at the service of ideals of domination, control and repression, never being neutral (Madureira et al., 2018). The author connects the shock of post-World War II atrocities to a historical moment of questioning how such tragedies could be avoided in the future.

Therefore, questions such as those posed by Silva (2005): “How can individuals who are insensitive to barbarism be educated against it? (...) How can teachers be trained to convince people not to be cruel?” and “How can teachers be trained to know how to deal with their values and the values of their students?” (p. 128), are still relevant today to build a democratic society.

To continue this line of inquiry, it is necessary to question what processes of human development underlie the emergence of violence and manifestations of hatred, discrimination, and prejudice. What motivates someone to act violently? On the other hand, what motivates someone to speak out against injustice or to dedicate their life to helping people in dangerous situations? We see these different manifestations of human conduct both in extreme adverse situations and in everyday life. What could explain these differences?

In the broad field of psychology, American social psychology stands out in its research into prejudice with Allport (1954) being a seminal reference. He defined prejudice as “a hostile or preventive attitude towards a person who belongs to a group, simply because he belongs to that group, and is therefore assumed to possess the objectionable characteristics attributed to that group” (p. 22). Allport (1954) emphasized the significance of cognition in the occurrence of prejudice. Humans have the ability to categorize individuals and/or groups and associate these categories with positive or negative traits. This usually happens swiftly, when we are not even consciously aware that we are judging, interpreting and categorizing events and people around us. When one group considers itself superior (i.e. better than) to another group, prejudice has the potential to emerge (Pérez-Nebra & Jesus, 2012).

Despite the undeniable contribution of Allport (1954) and other researchers in the field of American social psychology (Pérez-Nebra & Jesus, 2012), there is a tendency to overly emphasize cognitive processes. This leads to a limited understanding of prejudice as a multifaceted complex human phenomenon. Therefore, it is worth highlighting the

contribution of authors who examine this phenomenon from different perspectives, through the lens of Cultural Psychology (Cabra, 2020; Holanda & Madureira, 2022; Madureira & Branco, 2007, 2012).

Cabra (2020) elaborates more specifically on the concept of norms, stating that they operate on a social and psychological level of human beings. The author's effort is to make sense of the concept of norms by considering the interdependence and mutual coconstruction between subject and culture, i.e. norms are not in the subject or in the culture, but in the relationship and coconstruction between the two, in the movement of human experience.

The author argues that norms, at first, may seem to restrict the subject rather than open up possibilities, but that they themselves create a field of possibilities, even if limited. Furthermore, they define a field of transgression and disruption of the norm itself. Based on the contributions of Valsiner (2014), Cabra (2020) elaborates on the idea that norms are what differentiate human beings from other species. More precisely, what differentiates us is recognizing that human (psychological) phenomena are fundamentally interconnected with culture, with others, with otherness, and are therefore normative. However, we are not reduced to norms because although they culturally canalize aspects of our being, we have agency in the coconstruction, transformation and transgression of the norms already in place, and can thus generate the emergence of new rules or agreements.

Brinkmann (2010) adds that psychological phenomena are inherently subject to normativity and morality. In other words, social norms guide the behavior of human beings and, psychologically, they organize a person's way of thinking, feeling, and speaking, to which we also add their way of acting (Brinkmann, 2011; Cabra, 2020). What has been constructed about values from the perspective of Cultural Psychology appears to be a fertile path for both deepening the discussion on the issue of norms, and also for understanding prejudices from this perspective.

The Ontogenesis of Values and Prejudices

Values and prejudices, from the perspective of Cultural Psychology, are understood as affectively rooted beliefs throughout an individual's life, which guide and orient their perceptions, feelings, thoughts, and actions (Branco, 2018). Values are related to what draws individuals closer - to people, ideas, groups - that resonate to something they find important. In contrast, prejudices are characterized by a movement towards distancing, rejecting and/or repelling. They are, nonetheless, an intrinsic human phenomenon.

When investigating the ontogenesis of values and prejudices, that is, when trying to understand how and why someone, throughout their life history, internalizes certain values and not others, it is necessary to recognize the overpowering role of the affective dimension in the meaning-making processes. This indicates how much the affective quality of the social relationships established by the developing individual is precious in the processes of internalization. In other words, psychological processes are affective-semiotic in nature (Paula et al., 2023; Valsiner, 2019).

Valsiner theoretically developed his model of Affective-Semiotic Regulation of the human *psyche* (2014) to describe and understand the ontogenesis of values and prejudices, that is, their emergence during a person's trajectory. The model takes into account the various levels at which people are affected by situations and interactions throughout their lifespan, exhibiting varying degrees of affective-semiotic generalization over their self-system (Branco et al., 2020). Although the specific contents of such generalizations are somewhat unpredictable and not determined, the proposed model consists of an effort to understand how affective-semiotic processes act to lead to the constitution of *Hypergeneralized Affective-Semiotic Fields.* These are fields that will play an important role in people's actions and psychological functioning, as well as in the way signs and affective-semiotic fields interact with each other in the context of the human motivational system.

Table 1 Affective-Semiotic Regulation Model (based on Valsiner, 2012, Branco, 2021)

LEVEL 4 HYPERGENERALIZED AFFECTIVE-SEMIOTIC FIELDS (field-like signs)	"I feel something... I can't clearly describe what I'm feeling... But it makes me feel like..."	**Values** **Prejudices**
		Verbal reference eventually disappears as it is insufficient to describe experience
LEVEL 3 GENERALIZED FEELINGS	Describing complex feelings: "I feel a mixture of disgust and discomfort"	**Gradual dificuldade de descrição verbal dos afetos**
LEVEL 2 CATEGORIZED FEELINGS (point-like signs)	Joy Sadness Disgust ...	
		Emergence of verbal reference and semiotic mediation
LEVEL 1 EMERGING FEELINGS (at sign threshold)	Well-being Unease	**Nature of physiological responses**
		Noticing sensations from their physiological basis
LEVEL 0 PHYSIOLOGICAL LEVEL		**Neuronal Excitation and Inhibition**

Despite being presented as a hierarchical system, where the higher levels exercise power over the lower levels, this is a dynamic model. The levels presented are not mutually exclusive and do not operate in a linear fashion (Valsiner, 2012). For a better understanding of the model, we present next a summary of each level and their systemic (inter)relations.

Level 0 refers to the biological human body and the physiological processes of neuronal excitation and inhibition that occur there. It is the biological locus of bodily sensations. For example, the sensation of pain when touching a flame sends signals to the human body to move away. This would be the level of experience at identified at Level 0.

Level 1 is related to the immediate emerging feelings experienced by the person, but they are still pre-verbal and pre-semiotic; for example, the sensation of pain upon contact with a flame may evoke unpleasantness and unease. At Level 1, despite its intrinsic relation to Level 0, an emerging subjective experience can be identified. This means the individual can relate to previous immediate sensory experiences but does not yet attribute any specific (semiotic) meaning to them (Valsiner, 2012).

This concept can be exemplified through the behavioral conditioning of dogs. When exposed to an aversive stimulus, such as a shock, it associates with past experiences of pain and instinctively avoids the source of potential harm. As a result, the dog's behavior becomes conditioned due to past experiences of pain. However, we cannot say that it attributes meanings such as "good", "bad", "dangerous" or "safe" to these experiences. If we consider the example of a child experiencing pain and hesitation when touching a flame, there may also be conditioning based on their past experience; however their experiences occur within a specific socio-cultural context. This context allows the child to attribute primary and generic meanings to their experience. After all, they are part of a relational and cultural context full of meanings.

The person's Level 1 affective field, influenced by their past experiences, develops semiotically from an early age through the progressive use of language. Hence, the experiences, now *affective-semiotic*, will allow the child to articulate specific emotions through language at Level 2. These emotions, then, acquire names such as joy, sadness, anger, and so on. As Valsiner (2012) states:

> Mediation by signs creates a psychological distance between the thinker/speaker and the affective field of differentiation: discussing human happiness does not mean that the person discussing is happy. All cognitive activity of people that focuses on

> emotions outside their context – in terms of specific categories (...) – takes place at Level 2. (p. 260)

Considering this, emotions and feelings are meanings that can be attributed to one's own experience, and can become the object of communication and analysis. For example, a group of people can talk about anger, discussing what anger is for each person, and what their experience is like when they feel angry. However, they can do this without necessarily being angry at the time. Therefore, it is observed that there is a quality of abstraction not only to name emotions but also to analyze and discuss them, and (re)interpret them (Zittoun, 2015).

Although notably more sophisticated at Level 2, the affective-semiotic processes have not yet reached their maximum regulatory potential, which is only achieved at Level 4. This refers to a state of hypergeneralization, that is, a powerful capacity to guide the subjective life and actions of the individual. Level 3 represents the start of the generalization of the categories of feeling. At this level, feelings become more powerful, and more challenging to define or explain verbally (see Table 1).

For example, what happens at this level is characterized by an internal dialogue such as "I'm feeling kind of sad...", "I think I'm annoyed, but I'm not sure why...". That is to say, the meanings that can be shared are generalized meanings "The seemingly 'original meaning' is not that of the past—but an original construction facing the future." (Valsiner, 2020, p. 38). Here, once again, an even greater quality of abstraction is observed, one that begins to move beyond precise language, yet affective expression continues to be strongly semiotically mediated.

Lastly, we have the hierarchically highest level of generalization, classified by Valsiner (2012) as consisting of *Hypergeneralized Affective-Semiotic Fields.* At Level 4, the individual is practically unable to articulate or verbally express their experience; it alludes to the affective quality and strength of the experience. *Hypergeneralized Affective-Semiotic*

Fields regulate the other levels, guiding the individual's perceptions, feelings, thoughts, goals and actions. It is at this level that values and prejudices are situated.

For instance, a person who feels distress or repulsion upon seeing the color orange may avoid it in their belongings and clothing. However, when questioned about the rationale behind their choice of not having anything orange, they may struggle to articulate a specific reason and simply state a general dislike of the color. Even if there is an attempt to explain further, this person may not be able to pinpoint the real reason for their repulsion or the intensity of their affective experience. As Lehmann and Klempe (2015) argue, much of what escapes our awareness and/or intentionality profoundly influences our actions and motivations. In other words, there are aspects that guide our actions beyond what we can understand, capture, or describe on a conscious level of perception.

This is why Valsiner (2012) describes affective phenomena as being inherently nebulous, because they have a tendency to elude our ability to elaborate through language. This verbal inaccessibility to affective phenomena is part of the psychological centrality of affect and human functioning. The understanding of levels within a hierarchy is related on Vygotsky's legacy about higher psychological function. However, Valsiner expands his analysis of these phenomena by explaining that higher levels of hierarchical integration within an individual's self system do not necessarily lead to a clearer articulation among the parts of the affective system. On the contrary, he suggests that the highest level of hierarchical integration manifests as hypergeneralized feelings—vague and elusive, yet mediated (affective-semiotic mediation).

This is why Level 4 is the most powerful, because it encompasses and orients all the other levels. As stated before, *Hypergeneralized Affective-Semiotic Fields* are associated with values (and prejudices), since values are a part of these higher psychological functions. Over the course of our lives, we internalize, construct, and (re)construct values that become

important to us precisely because they are charged with a high level of *affectivity*. These values mobilize and motivate our actions in certain directions, such as the search for *status*, money, power, justice, cooperation, solidarity, etc.

It is worth emphasizing again that, although in the attempt to clarify each level depicted in the model, we may have given the impression that it follows a linear progression structured in stages, this is not the case. The Affective-Semiotic Regulation Model is hierarchical to the extent that it relates to the notion of higher psychological functions, but all the levels are operating at the same time systemically and dynamically, and separating them in the model is just an attempt to explain how values (or prejudices) are created, internalized and (trans)formed.

Gradually, the affective quality of a person's interactions with the world, particularly with others who hold social significance to them, shapes their values over their lifetimes (Valsiner, 2012). This is why this is an ontogenetic process, with values acquiring a regulatory role as the individual navigates through their life experiences. By analyzing the various levels, the model facilitates the understanding of the ontogenesis of values and prejudices; that is, it explores the process by which an individual internalizes certain values and prejudices and not others throughout life.

To illustrate how this process unfolds, consider a child's development. Affective experiences typical of Level 1 are more intensely present in a baby after birth. The baby's immediate emerging feelings and sensations are very sharp. The baby communicates its hunger, sleepiness, discomfort to its caregivers even if they have not yet appropriated the processes of and the complex signs offered by culture. The other levels (2, 3 and 4) are, however, in permanent semiotic construction and development from then on. As time goes by, the baby grows, interacts with social others, and gradually develops their cognitive and affective-semiotic capacity through processes of communication and metacommunication

(Branco, 2014) and thus appropriates elements of culture through continuous processes of cultural canalization, internalization/externalization, explained above.

It should be remembered that these—cultural canalization, internalization, and externalization—are processes that include the participation of an *active* individual, a fundamental principle for Cultural Psychology. Through their experiences, children live through moments of tension and ambivalence about what is right or wrong, what is fair or not, what is a successful, desirable life or not, and so on. In this way, children internalize meanings and values from the collective culture and, in a coconstructive way, form their own Affective-Semiotic Fields that, if especially powerful, may give rise to personal values and possible prejudices along the way (Branco, 2016, 2018; Roncancio-Moreno, 2015).

In other words, as their Affective-Semiotic Fields become more complex and more affectively rooted, they become more and more powerful - hypergeneralized - regulating and guiding the subject's actions, making it increasingly difficult to access them through verbal language and, also, to modify them. They go beyond the realm of intentionality and end up guiding our behavior in an often covert and nebulous way. We act according to our values and prejudices, but we do not always know how to recognize them. Even when we do, however, and try to explain our values to other people, we realize that this is no easy task.

Nevertheless, this is not to say that transformation and change are not possible, but rather that for change to happen, it involves the mobilizations of affective-semiotic processes, not only cognitive ones. After all, rationality is more irrational than we think (Valsiner, 2012). "That is to say that our personal trajectories and emotional records provide our experiences with an affective dimension that both precedes and influences any logical assessment of reality, and that makes our sense-making processes unique." (Abreu et al., 2022, p. 39)

What is encouraging, however, is that Cultural Psychology sees the human being as an active being and, therefore, capable of producing changes not only in their environment but also in themselves. Transformations can occur in relations, through reflection and inter- and intrapersonal dialogues capable of mobilizing significant affects, as the person moves between the various levels of semiotic regulation. Therefore, promoting reflection and discussions in different social contexts, such as family and school, means enabling transformations that touch a deep affective level, capable of producing significant reorientations and changes. This is why we believe that *dialogue is* a fertile path for deconstructing prejudices, given its transformative power (Marková, 2003; Matusov, 2009, 2018; Tiburi, 2015; Wegerif, 2010). We further explore this idea in the following chapter.

Chapter 2 – Dialogical Practices and the Deconstruction of Prejudices

I imagine one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with pain – James Baldwin (1963), The Fire Next Time.

To better understand the processes of internalization of values and prejudices and the dynamics in relation to psychological processes, it is necessary to address a central topic to understanding this issue: social relations, interactions between the Self and the Other, between people and culture. As stressed in the previous section, human beings are biologically sociocultural (Bruner, 1990; Vygotsky, 1991), and there is nothing natural or essential about "human nature". As Vygotsky (1991) and Morin (2002) state, the human condition is, above all, cultural. Humans are completely dependent on the care of others to survive in the first years of life, unlike other mammals. A newborn baby has no chance of survival in isolation; it needs caregivers in order to survive (Dewey, 2014).

This places human beings in a very peculiar condition, of being both constituted (to a certain point shaped) by their sociocultural context, as well as they constitute it (Valsiner, 2014). Human beings develop the ability to attribute meaning to bodily sensations, emotions and what they perceive, and to share these meanings with the members of their species (Harari, 2014; Pino, 2005). The sense-making and meanings we construct over our lifetime are both cognitively but mostly affective-semiotically internalized as we explored in the previous chapter. Higher mental functions such as learning, creativity, memory, and intelligence, as described by Vygotsky (1991), are affective in nature and always develop in a relational context, since the process of constructing meanings is mediated through language (Linell, 2009). Therefore, one of the vital characteristics of human survival is the ability to communicate and coconstruct knowledge and stories across generations (Marková, et al., 2020). Hence, this chapter will address relevant aspects of the dialogical paradigm, consistent with Cultural Psychology.

Dialogue and dialogism

The dialogic paradigm we adhere to—as outlined by Branco et al. (2023) and further examined by Paula and Branco (2022a, 2022b)—primarily draws from psychology and pedagogy fields of study. It also incorporates insights from diverse areas such as linguistics, philosophy, and semiotics, highlighting the importance of interdisciplinarity. A key assumption of dialogical perspectives is the notion of an ontological interdependence between the Self and the Other, who actively coconstruct knowledge, meanings, and beliefs (Marková et al., 2020). As Linell (2009) states, "Sense-making is always an interaction between the potentials of the linguistic resources and various aspects of contexts that are made relevant in situations of use." (p. 40). Therefore, the relationship between the Self and the Other does not only refer to two people in interaction, but also to their contexts, belongings, institutions in which they participate and represent (Marková et al., 2020).

Dialogue is not understood as the alternation of words and enunciations (Linell, 2009), since not all communication is verbal and explicit (as affective-semiotic processes constitute it). Thus, not only the linguistic signs play an important role in meaning-making, but also relational and affective aspects, as Branco and Valsiner explore in their book on communication and metacommunication (2004). According to Pino (2005), "Speech is not reduced to code, nor is it a production of the individual. Speech is a social event, the result of verbal interaction between a speaker and an interlocutor." (p. 143)—an event which, we would add, is permeated by affectivity, and involved in nonverbal exchanges.

Thus, the dialogic paradigm in psychology is focused on examining relational processes, not word by word exchanges, but the interwoven meanings, negotiations that occur in interaction with others (Marková, 2003; Marková et al., 2020). This is why we consider metacommunication as an important concept for dialogical perspectives because it underlines the affective dimension of communication. Metacommunication refers to the relational

aspects of communication (communication about communication), and it occurs continuously as people exchange words (or not) while interacting. Being communication about the communication, it signals the *relational quality* of a given interaction (Branco, 2014; Fatigante et al., 2004; Paula et al., 2023).

Dialogue, then, is an interaction between individuals who are coconstructors of meaning. It cannot be fully understood or analyzed without considering cultural aspects of the context in which it occurs (Marková et al., 2007). Dialogism, then, is a theoretical approach that studies dialogical processes, recognizing that human existence and experience are fundamentally permeated by language and all sorts of meaning-making processes (Linell, 2009; Marková et al., 2007).

For Bakhtin (1997), an authentic dialogue is one in which there is room for new questions and inquiries to arise and lead to further investigations into the emerging meanings. Considering that we are addressing processes that involve interactions, relationships, and dialogues it is crucial to note that they are inherently permeated by tensions (Marková et al., 2007). These tensions may not only arise between individuals, though they certainly can, but are primarily identified between ideas, discourses, and perspectives (Marková, 2003). But as Fecho et al. (2020) point out through the use of metaphors, “Sources of tension can cause headaches or ulcers, but sources of tension also allow music to vibrate from the strings of a guitar, the Golden Gate Bridge to continue to straddle the Bay.” (p. 12).

Tension, therefore, is an essential component that moves within dialogue and propels it forward (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2013). Within educational settings dialogical practices can be considered as fruitful ways of working on these tensions to promote human development. Through dialogue, new perspectives and meanings can emerge, promoting learning and developmental processes (Fecho et al., 2020; Glaveanu, 2023; Linell, 2009; Marková et al., 2007; Matusov, 2009, 2018; Paula & Branco, 2022a; Wegerif, 2010). However,

implementing dialogical practices in schools is extremely challenging. Teachers often believe that dialogue should be peaceful and harmonious (Paula, in press; Branco et al., in press), and do not have the resources to deal with the conflicts and dissonances that might emerge. By acknowledging tensions, disagreements and conflicts arising from dialogue, the aim is not to make these voices harmonious, but rather to promote authentic listening to differences and be open to solutions that include the consideration of all processes involved (Hermans et. al, 2017; Marková et al., 2007).

Fecho et al. (2020) propose that,

> To be engaged in dialogue intended to facilitate learning through self and others (...) is to move from dialogue to the dialogical. In doing so, participants shift from simply responding to responding with purpose, to hearing and being heard, to efforts to understand and be understood, to acknowledging perspectives (...) (p. 4)

In other words, being engaged in dialogue means moving towards the active practice of listening and being listened to, expressing your point of view, and being touched by the point of view of others. However, a common concern that the authors point out is the lack of support and space for teachers to engage in this type of dialogue with their students (Fecho et al., 2020; hooks, 2013; Kennedy, 2005). Educators may feel insecure and afraid when they open themselves to these practices. After all, dialogic tension does not only occur at a rational and cognitive level, but particularly at an affective, value-laden level (Linell, 2009), as explored in the previous chapter.

It is inevitable that interactions between teacher and student or between students will push or defy the beliefs and values of those involved (Matusov, 2018). Because, when in contact with another person, different from oneself, we are necessarily engaged and challenged by a permanent process of construction and reconstruction of meanings (Vygotsky, 2018). Teaching is a relational endeavor that will inevitably be faced with

tensions. These tensions are not mere incidents but are central to the process of education. They stem from a deeper, more intrinsic principle coherent with both Cultural Psychology and the dialogic paradigm, that is, dialogism is not just an aspect of human existence; it is an ontological condition (Bertau et al., 2013; Branco, 2018; Linell, 2009; Marková et al., 2020; Matusov & Miyazaki, 2014; Sidorkin, 1999; Zittoun, 2014). This implies that encountering dialogicality is not a choice but a fundamental aspect of being human, making such tensions inevitable in any educational setting (Sidorkin, 1999).

Considering this ontological basis also means that dialogue does not only occur "externally" to the individual in communication with others, but it participates in the constitution of the *self*. For this reason, we briefly explore the contributions to the Dialogical Self Theory, to understanding how dialogue constitutes our dialogical selves (Hermans, 2001).

Dialogical Self

Hermans (2001) developed the Dialogical Self Theory (DST) as a theoretical framework to understand the constitution of the self and its implications in the context of clinical psychology. Regarding its heuristic value, since its inception, the theory has been expanded across varied fields beyond clinical psychology, which include developmental psychology, education, organizational psychology and so on. Anchored in the theoretical elaborations of Herbert Mead and Mikhail Bakhtin, Hermans proposes that the Self is a sort of dynamic system that develops much like a society, with a multitude of voices. This means that, throughout life, the individual internalizes the voices of those people who are especially important to them, as well as other voices from the culture, and these voices then come to constitute their Self, their sense of self and the world. Such different voices give rise to I-positions, i.e., positions that individuals assume in relation to themselves and the world.

The Dialogical Self Theory criticizes the notion of a unified, static Self, a harmonious entity "inside" the person. By introducing the concept of multiple self-positions(ings), Hermans (2001; 2018) emphasizes the relational nature of the development of the self, and its ontological condition – dialogically rooted. I-positions, much like people in interaction, can complement each other, agree, negotiate, engage in conflict, etc. The dialog between these positions – not necessarily intentional or conscious – has the potential to give rise to new positions. In other words, there is a continuous, dynamic process of negotiation between different positions.

To give an example Branco and Madureira (2008) analyze the story of a research participant from a DST perspective. She was a 25-year-old college student who was grappling with a personal conflict surrounding her Catholic faith and her identity as a lesbian woman. The authors identified two strong positionings of the young woman, I-as-a-catholic and I-as-a-lesbian, both important positionings in her life, that were in conflict. After a time of reflection on lived experiences and interactions with others, a third position emerged: I-as-missionary, that is, someone who can spread the gospel to the LGBTQ+ community while still being true to her other positionings.

This example does not have the purpose of judging the young woman's experience. It is important to remember that this brief account is a snapshot of a much larger, ongoing process. Still, this example offers insights on the theoretical propositions we described. Namely, that the self system is composed of multiple I-positions that interact with each other, and at times converge, other times contradict each other. In dialogue and self-reflection, positions do not substitute one another, but are repositioned, shifted, and transformed in the irreversible time (Valsiner, 2021; Zittoun, 2007).

In more recent elaborations, Hermans et al. (2017) further explored the concept of dialogic self as a democratic Self. Democracy is, in this context, a metaphor for the

organization of a plural, diverse society that often needs to consider different positions, negotiate, and be ready to navigate conflicts between groups. In a democratic society, it would be ideal to consider the impact of power relations, different accesses people have to resources, when engaging in dialogue. Voices should have space to express themselves, negotiate differences, and give rise to new positions (Hermans, 2018; Hermans et al., 2017).

Based on this metaphor, the authors state that the Dialogical Self system works similarly: multiple voices, in this case, I-positions, which, in dialogue with each other can generate new positions. The tension between positionings can, on the one hand, bring new possibilities for paths, opinions, conclusions, feelings, possibilities for understanding one's existence in the world; and on the other, it can cause discomfort and risks, such as feelings of confusion or loss of sense of self. Therefore, the authors do not claim that every tension between positions is necessarily positive (Hermans et. al., 2017), but as Glaveanu (2020a, 2020b) states, new possibilities always emerge with movement (in this case, the dialogical movement between positions), and these novelties are essential for human development.

Dialogical practices: diversity, openness, and multiple perspectives

Considering that both perspectives – Cultural Psychology and Dialogical Self Theory – emphasize the tension between processes of meaning-making and positioning as an inherent aspect of human development, whether in dialogue with others, or within the self system itself, it is pertinent to elaborate on the impact of dialogical tensions in the school context. Fecho et al. (2020), when talking about pedagogical practices, use the concept of wobble to describe moments when the teacher does not have an immediate response to a situation that emerges in the classroom. This phenomenon describes a certain imbalance—an off-center moment that does not result in a fall, but rather in a sway or wobble. Such instances can provoke or lead to fear and uncertainty in teachers. The authors state that it is

important to understand what teachers *do* with these moments to promote, or not, dialogue, development, and learning. For them, wobble moments may lead to reflection and a dialogical engagement by students, but they are not a guarantee of openness to reflection and the construction of new paths. This path is not given *a priori*, but can be constructed, as wobbles allow for its emergence (Fecho et al., 2020).

Fecho et al. (2020) provide several examples of research conducted to investigate these wobble moments of novice teachers, that is, educators at the beginning of their careers. In one of these examples, a teacher named Kristen shares a story about a challenging encounter with a student. The student entered the teachers' lounge to make a request, and other teachers in the room asked the student to leave—students were not allowed in that space. The authors describe the tension Kristen experienced between the desire to respond to the student in a welcoming manner and the desire to maintain her professional role by ensuring her inclusion in the group of teachers.

Kristen had the opportunity to elaborate on this situation within the group of novice teachers in the research context (Fecho et al., 2020). As a participant in the study, part of the proposal was to write about moments of wobble and share them with the group, receiving comments and feedback from other participants. Fecho et al. (2020) emphasize that there are no quick and easy solutions to these situations, but through discussion and implementation of dialogical theories, it is possible to establish a communicative context in which teachers can navigate difficult situations.

Matusov (2009) also brings interesting considerations regarding the implementation of dialogical practices within classrooms. In the context of university teacher training programs, Matusov (2009, 2018, 2019) describes examples of feedback and exchanges he had with his students during the courses, which made him rethink the practice of dialogical pedagogy. In one of his examples, based on one student's comments, Matusov (2009)

concluded that students still did not trust dialogical pedagogy, or even dialogue itself. He noticed a certain devaluation (underestimation) of these practices by students, perhaps because they still expected that, at the end of the class, there could be an absolute truth, an incontestable knowledge to be captured. Matusov (2009) realized that some students did appreciate dialogue in the classroom, but not yet as a living and continuous process permeating the basis of all classroom encounters. This permanent process he designated as ontological dialogue, and eventual dialogues he referred to as a specific tool to be used at certain moments in class.

It is noted, then, that teachers having the *intention* to be dialogical and implement dialogical practices is *not enough* for them to be successful (Paula & Branco, 2022a). Certainly, deep-rooted beliefs, values and habits about how educational processes should take place hinder the effective implementation of dialogical practices in schools. The cultural meanings we internalize –such as conceptions about education, the teacher's role in the classroom and the role of the students, together with the syllabus and other institutional demands (like bureaucratic chores) (Kennedy, 2005; Paula, in press), canalize the affective-semiotic quality of the experiences. In other words, this cultural canalization involves actions and practices, even if we are unaware of the canalization. For this reason, despite having the best intentions, educators can inadvertently revert to familiar, traditional interaction patterns in their teaching practices.

An interesting addition to this discussion that offers insights for viable solutions is Glaveanu's contribution (2020a; 2020c) on the concepts of *wonder* and the *possible*. From a sociocultural perspective of human development, Glaveanu (2020c) asserts that it is the activity of wonder—marveling, pondering with curiosity about something—that opens our minds to the movement between the self and the other, the known and the unknown, between certainty and uncertainty. Wonder, for the author, is what sustains people in a moment of

uncertainty, because it allows them to discover new possibilities, not being paralyzed or rigid in the face of uncertainty. The main relevance associated with the activity of wonder is the *openness* to the new possibilities that it provides (Glaveanu, 2020c).

In other words, someone who is willing to look at something unknown, something that arouses uncertainty with curiosity and wonder, is someone willing to learn from differences rather than erase or control them (Schellhammer, 2018). This is where openness to possibilities comes into play, there are no rigid positions, but rather openness to new understandings. Glaveanu (2020c) emphasizes that this is an openness to not knowing, diversity, and hearing new perspectives.

If dialogue proves to be a fertile path for the deconstruction of prejudices, considering its transformative power and its ability to affect and transform those who engage in dialogue (Matusov, 2009, 2018; Tiburi, 2015; Wegerif, 2010), then the ability of individuals to remain open to new perspectives without destabilizing themselves is crucial for transformations to occur (Glaveanu, 2020c). Sustaining the fear and uncertainty that diversity mobilizes is not an easy task, even when there is a clear intention to embrace diversity, as is the case with teachers dedicated to creating a respectful and democratic school environment. Thus, a closer look at teacher training is warranted. After all, how has teacher training prepared (or not) educators for these challenges? This will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 3 – Teacher Development and Pedagogical Practices

> *The ability to be awed, excited, and inspired by ideas is a practice that radically opens the mind. Excited about learning, ecstatic about thoughts and ideas, as teachers and students we have the opportunity to use knowledge in ways that positively transform the world we live in.* (bell hooks, 2010, p. 188)

Many Brazilian authors have made significant contributions while reflecting on the educational context (Archangelo, 2005; Arroyo, 2013; França-Sá, 2024; Louro, 1997; Patto, 2015). Seffner (2009), for example, points to the scenario of growth that public schools went through in the last 80 years, observing the considerable increase in plurality and diversity of the student body. The shortcomings and limitations previously found in educational access, once confined to middle to higher social classes, genders and ethnicities, now gave rise to diversity, and began to embrace and welcome new audiences. Predictably, the inclusion of people from traditionally marginalized groups in the educational context strongly impacted school structures and curricula. This scenario led to doubts and concerns about what kind of content should, ultimately, be taught. After all, what were the relevant topics to be addressed in school? What norms should be agreed upon for sharing spaces respectfully? Does it make sense to teach the same material in the same way to this ever evolving and diverse student body? (Seffner, 2009).

In this sense, Candau (2008), Carvalho (2008), Lopes (2008), and Moreira and Câmara (2008) discuss the multiculturalism of the Brazilian educational context. They underscore the existing tensions and the necessity to reinvent both the curriculum and pedagogical approaches. This redesign aims to include multiple experiences and perspectives concerning the school community, that is, students, parents and family, educators, and administrators. Candau (2008) raises the question how schools perceive plurality and diversity. She concludes that, despite the persistent efforts to standardize and homogenize the school culture (i.e. practices, curriculum, interactions, etc), difference and diversity are not

characteristics that can be erased. Instead, they are constitutive of the pedagogical practice itself. They are a fundamental foundation of teaching and learning processes, as alterity and tension moves our learning and development as explored in previous chapters (Marková, 2003; Valsiner & Han, 2008).

However, as Seffner (2009) asserts, one of the challenges of Brazilian public schools is not merely accepting people considered "different" or diverse. This challenge extends well beyond acceptance or tolerance (Miskolci, 2016). The authors argue that the primary commitment of schools lies in ensuring favorable conditions for the development and learning of *all* students.

Brazilian schools have historically excluded—or being a vehicle for the exclusion—of many people, especially those in greater social vulnerability (Almeida, 2019; Patto, 2015; Seffner, 2009). In addition to emphasizing the profoundly relational nature of school performances, Patto (2015) draws attention to the increasing difficulties in communication and negotiation among people, not only within schools but also in broader society. This point is reiterated by Giridharadas (2022), who contends that polarization and defensiveness have significantly hindered communication between different groups. As a result, we have witnessed an increase in hostility, violence, discrimination, prejudice within schools' contexts.

These challenges are both inside and outside the school gates, they are inexorably intertwined (Moreira & Câmara, 2008). Yet, educational settings do hold the potential to transform the existing power dynamics that perpetuate inequalities, injustices, and violence in society (Foucault, 1979; hooks, 2013). As bell hooks (2013) states, "As the classroom becomes more diverse, teachers have to confront how the politics of domination are reproduced in the educational context." (p. 56).

At the forefront of preventing violence and discrimination is the question of how we can stop these incidents before they escalate. Furthermore, it is relevant to explore how to foster respect, safety, and dialogue among people in a way that differences are not seen as barriers. Schools and educational contexts provide a particularly fruitful setting for this kind of work (Barreto, 2016; Quirino & Rocha, 2013). It is crucial to review research that has addressed these issues, focusing on challenging and dismantling discrimination and prejudice in educational environments.

Our study specifically seeks to understand teachers' experiences in relation to these pressing issues. Educators are essential to the school community, tasked with teaching future generations (Tunes, 2018), yet there is still much to explore about their daily experience in class, their struggles, and motivations on a routinely basis. Much has been explored about their sense of identity and role as teachers (Holanda & Madureira, 2022; Leijen et al., 2018; Monereo, 2022; Vandamme, 2018; Xing et al., 2024), but our interest lies more specifically in understanding the *developmental processes* of teachers.

By focusing on teacher development, we aimed in the present dissertation to gain new insights into how teachers navigate and respond to challenges of discrimination, prejudice, conflict, and the uncertainties that these bring. Moreover, how these experiences impact their teaching strategies and interactions with students. This perspective is crucial because teachers are not only implementers of educational policies, but they also are active individuals, who interpret the world in their unique ways. They play a pivotal role in either perpetuating or challenging the existing sociocultural norms in their classrooms.

We believe that teachers' experiences and development have the potential to provide valuable information into educational practices. These insights can help to improve their practices and foster a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. In the following

section, we present and discuss studies that offer insight on teacher training and the deconstruction of prejudices.

Teacher training and the deconstruction of violence and prejudice

Interesting studies addressed research-intervention with teachers concerning issues of prejudice, violence, and problematic interpersonal relationships at school. A notable example is the study by Bonamigo et al. (2014), titled "Research-intervention about violence in schools." This study adopts a perspective grounded in psychology to examine violence within the school environment. The authors conducted a research-intervention involving teachers and students, aimed at fostering reflection and discussion about the different ideas and perspectives participants held concerning the issue.

They found that the participants (teachers, students, and parents) considered school violence an urgent problem. Their concern was related not only to literal violent acts but also to the short, medium, and long-term effects these actions had on the school environment. These effects diminished the perception of safety and trust among the school community. However, despite recognizing the gravity of the situation, when asked about potential solutions and strategies to address this violence, the predominant response participants gave was advocating for increased control, specifically through enhanced school policing (Bonamigo et al., 2014).

In line with findings from several other studies (Borges-de-Miranda, 2017; Holanda & Madureira, 2022; Madureira et al., 2018; Manzini & Branco, 2017), Bonamigo et al. (2014) criticized the common misconception that violence is an external issue to the school environment—coming from the outside in. They emphasize the importance of understanding this phenomenon in its complexity so that we can develop effective long-term strategies.

Lima and Silva (2014) provide detailed information on the methodology used in a series of research-intervention meetings as part of a continuing education program for early childhood teachers. These meetings aim to analyze the impact of the encounters on teachers' work and enhance the quality of their pedagogical practices. The participants in this study were volunteers who had attended the offered training. At each meeting, they were provided with a printed lesson plan outlining the theme, objectives, and methodology for that session. The lesson plan guided the training meetings, but the authors report that it was flexible enough to allow participants to propose changes once they reviewed it. Another resource used during the research was video files. Some moments of the teachers' practice in the school were filmed so they could later reflect on the situations related to their pedagogical practices, a method that Ibiapina (2008) called videotraining[3] (Lima & Silva, 2014). They concluded that the collaborative work between researchers and participants could improve teacher's practices, as they engaged in collective reflections.

Cavalcante's (2014) study offers insightful considerations that connect with other findings (Rosa-Silva & Júnior, 2007; Gonçalves et al., 2005). Her research focused on analyzing teachers' discourse and observing their actions in the classroom to identify potential discriminatory practices related to social class and ethnic-racial identities. Cavalcante (2014) concludes that while the teachers who took part in her research acknowledged the presence of racial and class prejudices in the school, they often failed to recognize their own discriminatory behaviors and attitudes during daily interactions with students.

The author reiterates that, even though with good intentions, teachers are often betrayed by what hooks (2013) called "the social formation inspired by the white supremacist colonizing discourse" (p. 115). Therefore, Cavalcante (2014) advocates for the importance of

[3] In Portuguease *videoformação,* that could be translated also as videodevelopment.

incorporating topics related to ethnic-racial and class issues, as well as discriminatory practices, into continuing teacher training programs.

A few studies addressing this topic provide a general description of the procedures implemented in the respective teacher training programs (Bedin & Pino, 2018; Marchiori et al., 2005). Additionally, other research emphasizes the need for more thorough integration of topics such as the prevention of violence, discrimination, and issues related to prejudice in teacher training programs or underscore the necessity of investing in the overall quality of teacher training broadly (Cavalcante, 2014; Gatti et al., 2019; Gonçalves et al., 2005; Holanda & Madureira, 2022; Zechi & Vinha, 2022). However, they offer little clarification on *how* this could be achieved.

My own master's research (Paula, 2019) sought to investigate pedagogical practices, beliefs and values mobilized by a school project designed to foster respect, diversity and deconstruct prejudices. We verified that some educators, although considering dialogical practices as crucial for the project's success, often struggled to implement such practices. While addressing the issue of prejudices, some of them lectured students instead of inviting them to dialogue and reflect upon the issues that emerged. This suggests a need for educators to engage more deeply with dialogical practices during their own undergraduate education and continuing professional development. Such engagement would allow them to reflect, both individually and collectively, on the challenges and demands of their profession (Paula, 2019).

Despite varying theoretical approaches and disciplines—including Psychology, Education, and Linguistics—all the studies reviewed share a common conclusion: the need to investigate teacher training further, particularly continuing education and professional development. However, our review revealed a significant gap in exploring the underlying processes involved in teacher's development, particularly from the perspective of

developmental psychology, rather than studying career development in the sense of advancement or improvement. This gap highlights the necessity for a detailed analysis of their experiences and day-to-day practices, seeing teachers as individuals in development. Hence, additional research to contribute in this direction is needed.

Finally, a last study worth mentioning in alignment with our arguments is Fecho et al. (2020)'s. The authors explored the experiences of uncertainty and doubt that novice teachers faced. Their project, titled 'Dialogue and Emerging Practices of Humanities Teachers' or DEPTH, focused on teachers with less than five years of experience who attempted to implement dialogical practices. Highlighting the challenges of dialogical practice in schools, especially for novice teachers who face a high dropout rate in the United States, the study aimed to better understand these challenges and encourage the development of dialogical practices.

Fecho et al. (2020) carried out a qualitative methodological procedure called "Oral Investigation Process – OIP" conceived by Patrícia Carnini (Carnini, 2000, in Fecho et al., 2020). According to the authors, this technique consists of a process that allowed them, together with the participants, to access the information constructed in the research step by step, or layer by layer. Participant teachers were instructed to write narratives recounting moments of wobble (doubt, uncertainty) that they had experienced in their teaching practice.

Then they were asked to bring this written material to the group's meeting. A teacher was selected to read their narrative aloud at that meeting. Following the reading, participants engaged in a question-and-answer turn in the group to clarify any unclear aspects of the narrative. Then, group members would take notes and verbally highlight points from the narrative that resonated with them, while the narrative's author listened and took notes without responding. After this discussion, the group asked three questions to the teacher who shared their narrative. These questions were: (1) What points in this situation stood out for

you (in this case, for each person in the group); (2) What connections do you (the listener) build with this story?; (3) What problems were raised?

An important aspect that such process facilitated was the construction of shared understandings and meanings by presenting multiple perspectives on the same case. It compelled the person who shared the narrative to listen to others' interpretations of the story before reacting or defending their own actions, in line with the proposed procedure's stages of OIP. This approach helped them, with support from the group and researchers, to explore diverse viewpoints and evaluations of the phenomenon. The authors also stress that the process proved relevant to the entire group, not only to the person who told the story, noting that the three questions posed by the OIP guided participants' focus on different elements of the discussion. The first question draws attention to the aspects that stand out to participants; the second encourages teachers to connect with the experiences shared, encouraging a collective understanding; the third prompts participants to consider broader, significant questions about educational processes in general (Fecho et al., 2020).

This methodology has the potential to both theoretically and methodologically contribute to teachers' continuing education. After all, as the authors argue, there is a big difference between learning to teach and learning to be a teacher (Fecho et al., 2020). University education primarily focuses on teaching skills for future teachers, but they face unexpected challenges on the school ground. This is why continuing education proves to be a crucial context for supporting teachers in their pedagogical practice.

We would add that it is also a privileged context for human development. Viewing teachers as active participants in educational settings, as educators *and* learners. Therefore, understanding the processes of adult human development within these contexts is a relevant endeavor. In the present research we seek to analyze the processes that promote adult development within a group context and understand how psychologists and experienced

educators can support teachers in engaging with dialogical practices effectively. Therefore, next we present the methodology of our research, detailing the procedures we have constructed to achieve our research objectives.

METHODOLOGY

In conducting scientific research, one of the essential aspects that scholars must pay attention to is the internal coherence of the research, especially in processes of knowledge construction. Studies aimed at advancing theoretical understandings within the academic community, as well as offering practical solutions for societal issues, require careful alignment of epistemological, theoretical, and methodological frameworks (Valsiner & Branco, 2023). There needs to be a consistent thread connecting the overarching worldview—which encompasses a specific view of science and human phenomena—with the foundational theories and the chosen research methods. This ensures that the investigation of any given phenomenon is grounded in a coherent and systematic approach.

Methodology in scientific research serves as a structured framework within which researchers think, propose, and carry out their research questions in a systematized manner. It should go beyond the mere application of tools for data collection and searching for valid, reproducible data (Valsiner, 2017). This stance is shared by Gaskell and Bauer (2000), who contend that methodology is "a function of the researcher's theoretical orientation" (p. 337). For this reason, methodology is not seen as a tool that can be used and discarded but rather as a fundamental component of the research process (Valsiner, 2017; Valsiner & Branco, 2023). According to Brinkmann (2012), a researcher's tools are theoretical, not methodological. These theories are instrumental in navigating the context under investigation, offering lenses through which they can be interpreted and understood.

Thus, this research takes a qualitative approach to analyzing and interpreting the data. Recognizing that no scientific production is neutral (Fecho et al., 2020; Goulart & Torres, 2021; Jaspal et al., 2015), and, consequently, methodological choices are not either. We are interested in investigating adult development processes through a comprehensive perspective,

that is essential to understanding the complexity of these interdependent and systemic processes (Jaspal et al., 2015; Salvatore & Valsiner, 2008).

Historically, psychology has been based on the creation of rigid rules and principles aimed at obtaining the "data" of a sovereign majority, in other words, it tends to work with averages, standard deviations, correlations, and statistically significant differences between the data obtained (Valsiner, 2000; 2017). It is a trend in modern mainstream psychology to rely on the average responses collected from a given population (or group) to indicate a homogeneous trend in relation to the characteristics and behaviors of the people in that group (Toomela, 2010). However, when addressing human phenomena and processes of development that happen in everyday life, there is a need for methodologies that offer more nuanced and interconnected approaches to investigate and interpret such phenomena (Brinkmann, 2012; Valsiner, 2000, 2017; Valsiner & Branco, 2023) and that does not solely rely on hypothesis testing (Ohlsson, 2010).

In this sense, employing a methodological framework of an idiographic nature (Salvatore & Valsiner, 2008) affords the researchers the opportunity to delve into the uniqueness and specificities of individual experiences, drawing out broader insights into and generalizations about the processes that underly these unique experiences (Brinkmann, 2012; Salvatore & Valsiner, 2008; Ohlsson, 2010). These processes are the foundation through which unique experiences can emerge. In doing so, recognizing that each person and life trajectory is unique does not mean that there are no regularities, or organizing processes, that may be generalized in the study and analysis of human experiences. Researching specific experiences (i.e., single case studies) provides a framework for developing theoretical models, enabling us to establish a science of human development, as single cases allow us to probe the complex organization of human phenomena (Salvatore & Valsiner, 2008; Toomela, 2010).

Contrary to claiming neutrality in investigations such as this, we actually emphasize the researcher's active role in constructing the data. The researcher is as much involved as the participants in the (active) construction of knowledge. Hence, the interactions between researchers and people who volunteer for the study, as well as their motivations and interests, cannot be dissociated from the knowledge construction itself (Brinkmann, 2012; González Rey, 2005; Goulart & Torres, 2021). Consequently, data analysis is always a constructive and interpretive process (González Rey, 2005, Valsiner & Branco, 2023). In this section, we explore the key aspects of data construction in our research.

To do this, it is important to clarify the terminology we use. We deliberately refrain from using phrases like "data collection" or "gathering data" to avoid the misconception that data exists in a vacuum, ready to be harvested by researchers with little to no interference. Instead, as emphasized by Latin American scholars, we adopt the terms "data (co)construction", or "information (co)construction". This choice reflects the understanding that data is not compiled by an individual, but it emerges collectively, in interaction (González Rey, 2005, Goulart & Torres, 2021, Valsiner & Branco, 2023).

In qualitative research, the construction of knowledge means understanding that applying methods and techniques are not merely ways of establishing contact with the participants, but are a constitutive part of the study of human development itself (González Rey, 2005; Valsiner, 2017). Through communication and metacommunication, the negotiations of meaning flourish, adapt, and develop (Fatigante et al., 2004). As Fecho et al. (2020) point out, a key feature of qualitative research is its focus on human relationships and interrelationships that allow us to understand the nuances of the psychological processes involved, in other words, they allow for a more in-depth understanding of human phenomena.

Considering this, focus groups are a privileged space to construct data about interactions, as they present an opportunity to observe the communicative and

metacommunicative processes unfolding. Focus groups give us a chance to identify and analyze the participants' perspectives, opinions, and points of view on specific topics. In groups, we can witness the emergence of dissonances, consonances, misunderstandings, and reflections, that is, negotiations of meaning, in real time. Therefore, the way people position themselves and their ideas, and the processes therein involved can show up in specific ways within a group. Drawing from Gaskell (2000), group settings have the potential to foster collective understandings and facilitate meaning-making within a shared space. Together, participants engage in reflections that might not emerge individually.

For Marková et al. (2007), consistent with Gaskell (2000), focus group sessions allow for the analysis and understanding of phenomena such as beliefs, values, ideologies, and the evaluation of practices and knowledge that circulate socially. According to Marková et al. (2007), "focus groups are situated communication activities in which we can examine language, thinking and knowledge in action and so they provide manifold research opportunities for taking a dynamic research perspective" (p. 2). As Pereira and Sawaia (2020) contend, focus groups can promote eminent human development. Building on these authors' elaborations, we add that focus groups also present us with opportunities to explore the affective dimension – emotions and motivations mobilized within the group.

For these reasons, focus groups proved to be a fruitful research procedure in the context of our investigation. It is important to note that, within the theoretical-methodological perspective of Cultural Psychology, this method is employed with some flexibility. The primary goal is to foster discussions and reflections in the group settings, without being constrained by a predetermined number of people. From our perspective, what characterizes a focus group is active encouragement of dialogue, reflection, and discussion among participants, including the researcher. Because of this flexibility, focus groups bear a closer resemblance to typical, everyday discussions. Their purpose is not only to collect accounts of

events that have occurred in participants' lives but is mainly to understand how participants elaborate and coconstruct narratives about what is important to them (Brinkmann, 2012). For the purposes of our research, we refer to these focus group gatherings as sessions, meetings, or encounters.

Another helpful instrument for conducting qualitative studies is the interview. Interviews offer valuable ways to access a participant's perspectives in a more in-depth way, offering elements that help to understand their worldview, beliefs, values, and motivations (Brinkmann, 2012; Gaskell, 2000; Souza et al., 2008). We are aware that speech does not necessarily translate or reveal concrete practices, only observations could give us insight into that. However, the goal is understanding the participant's fields of meaning, because "When people are talking (...) in research interviews, they are not simply putting preconceived ideas into words, but are dialogically responding to each other's expressions and trying to make sense by using the narratives and discourses that are available" (Brinkmann, 2012, p. 110).

Ultimately, no matter the instruments used in qualitative research, Gaskell and Bauer (2000) argue that good practices in the investigation endeavor require researchers to be open to surprises, to face inconsistencies and contradictions in the data, and to maintain transparency in detailing their methodological steps. Data analysis, especially the type of data that deals with the participants' narrative and voice, does not follow a linear, step-by-step process. Researchers often find themselves navigating a complex landscape of contradictions and iterative cycles of approaching the data. Their challenge is to discern, or even construct, a coherent thread amidst this apparent disorder, encountering surprises along the way that challenge their previous assumptions.

It is precisely this process of being open to surprises and willing to navigate contradictions, that opens the path to new insights and novelty within the field of research. Therefore, to offer clarity and transparency on how our study was conducted, what it entailed,

and what guided our interpretations, we present the methodological description in the following section.

Participants

This study included thirteen middle and high school teachers, who, at the time of the study, were working in private or public institutions across four states in Brazil, including *Distrito Federal (Brasília), Minas Gerais, Santa Catarina*, and *Rio de Janeiro*. Table 2 below provides a general overview of the participants. To protect their anonymity, specific locations will not be disclosed. All names used from here on are pseudonymous, and any identifying characteristics or details have been omitted or altered to protect the participants' identities. These precautions were taken to uphold ethical responsibilities to the participants.

Table 2 Participants overview

	Participant's pseudonyms	Level they teach	Discipline/Courses
1	Alex	High School	Mathematics
2	Amanda	Middle School	Literature
3	Ariel	Middle School	Literature
4	Elsa	High School	Science
5	Eric	High School	Mathematics
6	Lia	Middle School	English
7	Maya	High School	Sociology
8	Naomi	Middle School	Mathematics
9	Nicole	Middle School	Literature
10	Olivia	Middle School	English
11	Stela	Middle School	History
12	Theo	Middle School	Science
13	Vivian	High School	Philosophy

All participating teachers hold degrees in their respective fields, eight had completed at least one specialization course (*latu sensu*) in various fields of education, and one participant had a master's degree. Three participants expressed that they wanted to pursue a master's in the near future (a sentiment that strengthened during the meetings, which will be explored in

subsequent sections). At the time of research, three participants were working as pedagogical coordinators[4], meaning they were not working in the classroom at the time. Still, it is crucial to note that they all had extensive teaching experience. Their transition to pedagogical coordinator roles was based on years of classroom teaching, underscoring that this specific role is not exclusively administrative but rather a pedagogical one. Details regarding participant recruitment are described in the Procedures sub-section.

Materials and Instruments

During the recruitment and focus group phases of *data construction*, the materials and instruments used were as follows:

- Zoom: the online video conferencing platform Zoom was used in the research for individual meetings with participants at the beginning of the research (recruitment), and later used for the focus group sessions and individual interviews. Within the meetings, Zoom's audio and video recording capabilities, chat function, and screen-sharing features were used for presenting visual materials, including slides with prompts for discussion, images, and video excerpts (details provided in the Results).
- Mentimeter (https://www.mentimeter.com/): word cloud feature used for group dynamics in one of the sessions.
- WhatsApp: To facilitate rapid communication, a WhatsApp group was created to include all participants, the researcher, and research assistants. This setup was

[4] This is the translation for *coordenador pedagógico* in Portuguese. They are responsible for facilitating curriculum integration, collaborating on the development of teaching materials, stimulating educational innovation, and facilitating conflict resolution within the educational setting. The closest translations we found in English to refer to this post is Instructional Coordinator or Curriculum Coordinator, but they are not a direct parallel, just an approximation. In Brazil, pedagogical coordinators, as we will refer to them in this research, do not necessarily have a background in administration or a master's degree in education, as is common in countries such as the United States. Typically, they are experienced teachers with a bachelor's degree, who have spent several years teaching in classrooms. Frequently, after a time as pedagogical coordinator, for instance a couple of semesters or year, the teacher then goes back to the classroom – there is a rotation on this job post.

particularly effective for sharing meeting links and assisting the participants, for example, when they had internet connection issues or difficulties joining the meetings.

- Google Classroom: this platform was a central hub for sharing the materials with the participants, such as slides, chapters, texts to be discussed, and other resources. It was the place where participants shared their weekly activity (described in the Focus Group Procedures subsection).

For the *data analysis,* other materials and instruments were used:

- ATLAS.ti (https://atlasti.com) is a qualitative analysis software designed to aid in organizing the information constructed. Although it is important to stress that the responsibility for interpretation and analysis of the data falls solely on the researcher, this software facilitates the organization and exploration of large amounts of data in a structured manner. ATLAS.ti supports different types of files in its systems, including, but not limited to, Word documents, videos, audio, and images. This software allows the researcher to code data across all these different files, which enhances the ease of navigation between them. In our study, the idea of "coding the data" is better described as categorizing (finding patterns, emphasizing relevant information in line with the research objectives), which will be elaborated in more detail in the Data Construction and Analysis subsection. Lastly, another key feature of the software relates to data security. It affords encrypted storage and password-protected access that safeguards the research information against unauthorized use or security breaches. This feature is vital as there is an ethical obligation to maintain the confidentiality of participant files; ATLAS.ti helps to ensure that. In summary, given the size of the information compiled in this research and the varied file formats, this software proved to be very useful for

integrating and organizing the information safely. This facilitated the subsequent phases of analysis and interpretation, making them easier to navigate.[5]

- Transkriptor (https://transkriptor.com) is an online software that converts audio files into written text. This tool helped in the process of transcribing the focus group excerpts and the complete interview files. Its main feature was streamlining the transcription process by synchronizing the audio playback with its textural representation, resulting in a more efficient correction process. However, it is essential to emphasize that the researcher must thoroughly review all transcriptions to ensure their accuracy. While Transkriptor facilitates the transcription process, it cannot substitute meticulous proofreading. Furthermore, although the software efficiently handles the conversion of speech to text, it does not capture the tone of voice, pauses, and emphases in speech, which were meaningful indicators for subsequent interpretations of the data.
- Miro (https://miro.com) and Canva (https://www.canva.com) are online platforms equipped with tools designed to assist in creating figures and images. Although both platforms offer a wide range of features for creating presentations or collaborating with teams, for example, the tools utilized in this research specifically focused on elaborating the figures presented in the Results and Discussion sections.

Procedures

Firstly, recruitment for the study was conducted through the distribution of flyers online, in platforms such as email and WhatsApp, where the researcher's contacts knew

[5] It is important to note that when we started using ATLAS.ti to organize information, the integrated AI tool was not yet available. In mid-2023, AI was introduced in the software as a feature, and it started to be a beta-test option. However, we did not utilize the AI feature during our use of the software; we only used the other standard features.

groups of teachers. Interested individuals were directed to contact the address provided on the flyer. Within two weeks, the researcher received approximately 130 emails from interested individuals.

The selection criteria for the participants included the following requirements: 1) to be an active educational professional in high school and/or middle school, preferably a teacher or a pedagogical coordinator (with teaching experience before this post); 2) to be interested in discussing relational challenges with students; 3) to have availability to participate in all eight sessions, which were pre-scheduled to happen on Saturday mornings; and 4) to agree to participate in the research after all ethical considerations were explained.

After applying the criteria, forty-one participants were selected for a preliminary interview, which consisted of an online meeting between the researcher and the participant, lasting 30 to 40 minutes. Participants were asked to share their motivation and interest in participating in the group sessions during these meetings. They were informed of the meeting's format and the schedule to confirm their availability. Participants were also encouraged and given space to raise any questions or concerns about the sessions and the research. They were thoroughly informed about the research's ethical considerations, which had the approval of the University's ethics committee (CEP/UnB).

Following the preliminary interviews, seventeen teachers were selected to participate in the study and signed the consent form. However, before the meetings commenced, two participants withdrew due to scheduling conflicts. Moreover, one participant failed to attend after the first session, despite multiple attempts to contact them, and one could not continue due to internet connectivity issues. Thirteen participants remained throughout all sessions, resulting in 16 hours of recorded information.

Lastly, four months after the group sessions took place, three participants were selected for individual semi-structured interviews. The participants selected for this interview

were those who were not only highly engaged during the meetings but also shared valuable insights that sparked our curiosity for deeper investigation—to check our understandings and interpretations. These interviews served as a follow-up to gather feedback on initial interpretations of the research analysis and to gather more insights into their experience of participating in the focus group. Moreover, the interviews sought to understand the impact (if any) of the meetings on each participant in terms of their development and how they were managing conflicts and uncertainties at that time. The length of the interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 1 hour and 10 minutes, resulting in 160 minutes of recorded information.

Table 3 offers a summary of the methodological procedures described thus far.

Table 3 Overview of the methodological procedures

Methodological Steps	Description
Flyer distributed online	A flyer was created and shared online through various WhatsApp groups, leading to 130 replies.
Preliminary interview	Forty-one individuals were selected for a brief preliminary interview. An online meeting was scheduled to discuss intervention participation.
Online focus group	Eight online focus group sessions were conducted with thirteen teachers.
Individual semi-structured interviews	Three individual semi-structured interviews were conducted online.

Focus Group

In this subsection, we provide more details regarding the focus group procedures, including how they were structured and how we conducted the whole process from the beginning to the end. First, it is essential to mention that before starting the study, my advisor and I recognized that an eight-week commitment and future interviews were a lot to ask of participants. So, we discussed the challenges and strengths of such a study with our colleagues. One of these discussions took place in my qualification exam, where professors

brought attention to the successful work of two doctoral students from our laboratory at the University of Brasília. They had effectively addressed a similar challenge, and their work (Cunha, 2021; Novaes, 2023) inspired the development of our methodology.

In these previous projects, both students carried out multi-week focus groups and found a promising strategy for enhancing participant engagement. In both cases, the focus group sessions took the format of extension courses offered by the university, which aim at providing courses and activities to both students and the wider community. They seek to strengthen the relationship between academia and the community, ensuring that the knowledge generated contributes positively to society. Therefore, carrying out the study in collaboration with the Extension Program served a dual purpose: it drew the university closer to the community (in this case, teachers), and provided a structured environment for our research to take place.

Once this overarching frame was established, we worked on the structure of each of the focus group sessions, which can be better described as being *semi*-structured. While an initial outline for all eight sessions was developed, each session was characterized by its openness and flexibility to change/adapt, according to the sessions' progression. Our approach was anchored upon dialogical principles, as well as by the methodological cycle (Valsiner & Branco, 2023), which guided the researcher to remain committed to changing plans in sync with participant contributions and inputs. That is, based on the topics they brought up and highlighted, plans for the subsequent meeting were eventually reset.

To clarify this point further, we identified specific topics of interest to raise with participants, including the teacher's role; their notions of dialogue or being dialogical; the main challenges they faced with their students; and their views on conflict in schools. Although we initially planned a sequence for introducing these topics across the sessions, this order was flexible and responsive to participant's contributions. Depending on the aspects

they emphasized or highlighted, we adapted the sequence, allowing some topics to move from background to foreground and vice versa, based on the dynamic interactions during the sessions.

For example, our initial plan was to introduce the topic of dialogue and dialogism in the second meeting, to explore participants' perspectives on these concepts. However, after the first meeting—when they introduced themselves and shared their motivations for joining the group—many expressed their uncertainties about handling conflicts correctly, questioning the "right" way to intervene and their anxiety/worry stemming from such uncertainties. This insight led us to prioritize discussing the teacher's role in the next session, exploring their conceptions and ideas of what it means to be a teacher, and what their views were on teaching styles (or pedagogical approaches) such as authority, authoritarianism, *laissez-faire,* and so on. Addressing these foundational concepts seemed crucial for establishing a solid base from which to explore later the meanings of dialogue and what it entails to be a dialogical teacher. This example serves to illustrate the dynamic and flexible approach we took in constructing the research procedures.

During the focus group sessions, our research team consisted of the researcher (myself), my advisor, and three research assistants: two were undergraduate psychology students and one a master's student. In every focus group session, I was present with at least one research assistant, who was responsible for technical support. This included managing backup recordings and providing logistical assistance, such as admitting participants into the Zoom meetings, distributing the link to those who needed it, and addressing any technical issues that might have arisen.

After each session, the researcher verified the integrity of the recording before uploading it to a safe, encrypted drive accessible only to the research team. Over the weekend, each team member watched the recording, took notes, and made commentaries. We

then gathered for at least two hours each week to share our impressions and observations about the session. This meeting served as a basis to plan and structure the following session, as stated before, to remain responsive to the participants' contributions. This iterative process was maintained throughout all eight sessions, providing balance with the necessary methodological rigor and flexibility.

Lastly, it is important to mention that we included a weekly activity between the sessions, which was explained to participants at the end of each encounter. In total, they had 16 hours to participate in the sessions and 16 hours to do specific tasks related to the course's contents – making it two hours of meetings each week, plus two hours for tasks. This activity aimed to maintain participants' engagement with the topics discussed until our next meeting. Recognizing our participants' demanding work schedules at their schools, we designed these activities to be engaging yet not overly time-consuming. The goal was to facilitate teachers' reflection and discussion during our meetings—all activities were related to the issues discussed—and to provide additional insights into the participants' meaning-making processes. Some examples were: (a) to watch the documentary "When I Feel I Know" (*Quando sinto que já sei)*[6] and write about the aspects that stood out for them and (b) to select three images that represent, or speak about, the kind of relational challenges they experienced in their pedagogical practice.

This information was valuable for contextualizing participants' understandings and helped the researcher to later analyze the data according to a triangulation of the information obtained from the focus group discussions and interviews. This activity enriched our overall understanding of the participants' perspectives and positionings. The differentiation between these two concepts emerged during the research and will be explained in the Discussion of

[6] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HX6P6P3x1Qg

this dissertation. A summary of each session is provided below. However, a more detailed description of the procedures and contents of the sessions developed during the course is provided in the Results section of the dissertation.

Table 4 Sessions' summary

Session	Date	Theme	Content Summary
1	12/03/2022	Introductions and initial agreements	Ethical issues, Zoom instructions, intervention planning, participant introductions, weekly activity
2	19/03/2022	Authority versus authoritarianism	Teacher's role, authority in the classroom, word cloud, trust relations, weekly activity
3	26/03/2022	Exploring trust, authority, and dialogue in education	Trust, authority, dialogue, ontological dialogue, weekly activity
4	02/04/2022	Challenges in pedagogical practice	Image discussion, generalization processes, stereotypes, prejudices, weekly activity
5	09/04/2022	Conflict and different perspectives	Image discussion, generalization processes, stereotypes, prejudices, weekly activity
6	23/04/2022	Strategies	Recap, strategy presentation, elaboration, weekly activity
7	30/04/2022	Uncertainty and wobble	Working with a dilemma, weekly activity
8	07/05/2022	Closing	Recap of all sessions, support networks

Data Construction and Analysis

Regarding data construction and analysis, the researcher carefully watched, viewed, and reviewed the focus group sessions' recordings (a total of 16 hours in duration). For each session, the researcher initially identified the key sections, extracts, and episodes, therefore selected for further analysis. Subsequent reviews of those sections aimed to pinpoint emergent themes, with a particular focus on teachers' positionings and repositionings when, in their narratives, they dealt with conflicts and situations of uncertainty and emergent, new perspectives. The episodes selected for closer analysis were those most pertinent to the research objectives.

The episodes were then transcribed for deeper analysis. Later, this helped in better elaborating the interview scripts to be used with those teachers selected for the semi-structured interviews, so that I could further explore questions/issues that arose during this preliminary phase of analysis with the participant. These questions included: a) How have the last few months been for you? b) What is your current experience in handling conflict situations in the classroom? c) We discussed student resistance to new practices in a few of our meetings, how do you perceive this issue today? and d) How do you view conflicts today? Do you think there has been a change in the way you view them?

We wanted to explore participants' perspectives on conflict and uncertainties, as well as gather feedback on the group meetings. As is the nature of semi-structured interviews, the questions were flexible and subject to modification or addition based on the flow of the conversation, with the overarching aim of achieving a deeper understanding of the topics at hand. The interview analysis, therefore, consisted of transcribing the interviews in full and identifying key themes relevant to the research objectives. This process was similar to the focus group analysis but added the triangulation of the information from the focus group sessions to offer a more holistic/global understanding of the participants' trajectories and meaning-making throughout the research process.

With the information constructed at hand and organized, we proceeded with the data analysis by identifying the main emergent themes among all the files, and carefully explored the conspicuous quotations that demanded further interpretation. During this phase, which demanded triangulation and iterative readings of the data, we created graphs, timelines, mind maps, whiteboards, and flipcharts. Digital platforms like Canva and Miro (as described previously in the Materials and Instruments subsection) helped organize the data effectively and guide our interpretation. The refined versions of these figures are presented in the Results and Discussion.

Below, Table 5 summarizes the sequence of the analytical processes, presenting a concise overview of the steps involved.

Table 5 Processes of Analysis

Data Analysis	**Description**
Watch all sessions	16 hours of recording divided into nine videos. Each session was watched, and notes were taken. (a) instances of teachers' repositionings; (b) emergent perspectives; (c) themes that emerged during the sessions.
Selection of video segments (episodes) and transcription	Selected relevant episodes were seen multiple times and then transcribed.
Elaboration of interview scripts	Interview scripts were constructed based on themes/issues that emerged in the focus group.
Interview transcription	Interviews were transcribed in full.
Iteration and triangulation	With the files uploaded to ATLAS.ti, iterative watching of the sessions, reading transcriptions, and triangulation of the information constructed.

In conclusion, the methodology employed in this research, along with the methods chosen throughout the processes of planning, data construction, and data analysis, was developed to best align with our theoretical framework and epistemology. Cultural Psychology and Dialogical stances understand human phenomena as complex, dynamic, and interdependent with culture and context. From this point of view, the intricate nature of living phenomena requires methodologies that resonate with and embrace this complexity, rather than compartmentalize it. Hence, our efforts in constructing a methodological approach aligned with our study's theoretical principles demanded a dialogical practice within the methodology itself. This involved a commitment to openness toward surprises and unexpected responses that emerged in the research, as well as a dedication to thoroughly analyzing the wealth of information gathered without shying away from its complexity. In the

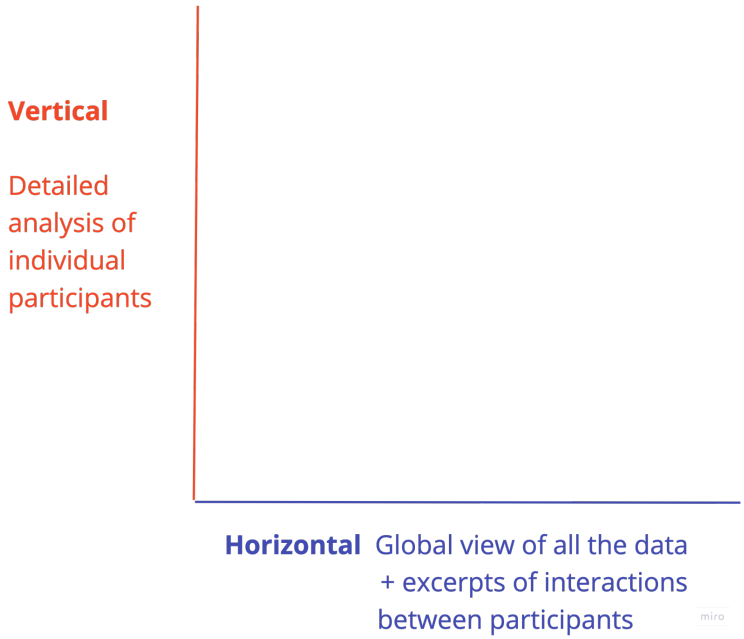
following section, Results are presented, offering the reader a comprehensive account of the information constructed in this research.

RESULTS

This chapter presents the information constructed in this study on how teachers can develop more resources to handle situations of uncertainty and conflict, mostly related to sensitive matters (e.g., prejudices, etc.). The investigation primarily focused on identifying and analyzing possible shifts in teachers' perspectives and positionings regarding how to manage uncertainties in conflict situations involving prejudices and other sensitive topics, as well as teachers' ideas concerning the implementation of concrete actions and social practices to improve their handling of such conflicts/controversial issues in their classrooms. Therefore, this section is dedicated to reporting the highlights of the information constructed; sharing participants' contributions and insights; and bringing to life their experiences, beliefs, and reflections.

The previous Methodology chapter detailed the procedures involved in our research, clarifying what we did and with what resources. Building on this foundation, we now proceed to share the essence of what transpired during the focus group sessions and subsequent interviews. Central to our analysis and the selection of the material organized here are the research objectives, anchored by our theoretical and epistemological lenses. This effortful alignment ensures that the results remain focused and relevant to the purposes of this research. Thus, to achieve clarity and coherence in the presentation of our results, we organized the analysis around two key axes. This structure allows for a comprehensive overview of the constructed information, as outlined below:

Figure 1 Axes of analysis



The **horizontal** axis represents a broad view of the data constructed across the eight sessions. We focused on narrative excerpts, quotations, and interaction sequences chosen according to their potential to reveal tensions, contradictions that generated wobbles, and indicators of collective and/or individual shifts. This view allowed us to trace and articulate the movements of perspectives between people in dialogue across the meetings.

It should be noted that shifts are considered instances of slight changes in thoughts, perspectives, positionings, or points of view—indicators of human development processes. These shifts might manifest as realizations during the interactions, such as, "I haven't thought about this before," or "That's an interesting point to consider, it made me think…." Specific examples of these shifts are provided in this chapter; however, the heuristic value of this concept for developmental psychology is further explored in the Discussion chapter.

The **vertical** axis consists of delving into detailed analyses of individual participants. Based on an idiographic approach, along this axis, we follow a specific participant

throughout the sessions, namely, the eight sessions plus the interview. This allowed us to spot nuances of the participants' perspectives and positionings regarding conflicts and uncertainties they faced in their practices. The selection of these participants was rooted in their meaning-making processes, which were particularly interesting in terms of possible changes in their positionings and perspectives.

In essence, the information is presented sequentially, starting from the horizontal axis, followed by the vertical axis of analysis. This structure aims to guide the reader through a layered understanding of our research outcomes, emphasizing the depth and breadth of the teachers' experiences and reflections shared in our study. We hope that these analyses inform future generations of researchers and educators on fruitful ways to navigate relational challenges in schools.

Horizontal Analysis

First, to broaden our understanding of the focus group sessions, we provide a detailed table (Table 6) of the contents and dynamics employed in each session. Each session is listed with its corresponding number and date, alongside the specific contents addressed. This structure offers a clear view of the themes discussed at each session and their progression throughout the study. This was achieved through our flexible approach to planning the meetings, allowing us to adjust the structure to meet the group's discussions.

Table 6 Sessions' contents and dynamics

Focus Group Sessions	Session date	Contents/Dynamics
1	12/03/2022	● Theme: introductions ● Initial agreements, ethical issues (confidentiality, recording security). Instructions for the Zoom platform include the use of chat, simultaneous rooms, mute microphone, etc.

		● General presentation of the intervention planning and schedule (reminder of days and times). Intervention topics: a) Difficulties addressing sensitive topics such as prejudices and discrimination; b) Classroom conflicts: student-student, teacher-student; c) Dialogical practices; d) Situations of uncertainty. ● Participants' introduction to the group + expectations ● Suggested themes for the meetings ● Weekly activity: Write briefly about a challenging situation you have experienced in your teaching practice. Explain how you felt, what you thought, and what you would have liked to do.
2	19/03/2022	● Theme: Authority vs. authoritarianism ● Discussions in small groups about "What is the role of a teacher? What should their competencies be?" and "What does authority mean to you? Examples: what does a teacher who has authority usually do? How to build authority in the classroom?" ● Word cloud generated with two questions: "What words come to mind when you think of a teacher who has authority in the classroom?" "And a teacher who does not have authority?" ● Trust relations ● Weekly activity: Read the chapter "3.4 Teaching requires freedom and authority" (p. 64) from the book Pedagogy of Autonomy by Paulo Freire. Then, write a brief summary containing the author's main ideas and your point of view regarding them.
3	26/03/2022	● Theme: Exploring Trust, Authority, and Dialogue in Education ● Trust relations, Authority vs. Authoritarianism (Freire) ● Dialogue and ontological dialogue (Matusov). ● Weekly activity: Select three images that, for you, represent or speak about the relational challenges you see in your pedagogical practice. They can be photos of something on the street that you want to take, like a mural, for example, or images taken from the internet, magazines, museums, paintings, etc. Any image that connects with you and represents what you see.
4	02/04/2022	● Theme: Challenges in Pedagogical Practice: Addressing Generalizations and Polarization ● Discussion of the images they sent. ● Generalization processes: Stereotypes, prejudices, and polarization ● Weekly activity: Watch the documentary 'When I Feel I Know' (Quando sinto que já sei[7]) and write or record the aspects that stood out for you the most.

[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HX6P6P3x1Qg

5	09/04/2022	● Theme: Conflict and Different Perspectives ● Comments on what stood out about the documentary. ● Re-watching a small part of it where a conflict situation was evident, then they discussed in groups these three questions: "What points stood out to you in this situation? What connections do you (who listened) make with this story? What issues were raised?" inspired by Fecho et al. (2020)'s framework. ● Weekly activity: Describe 2 to 3 examples of strategies that you consider successful or productive for dealing with sensitive situations (conflicts, prejudices) in school. List the pros and cons.
6	23/04/2022	● Theme: Strategies ● A brief recap of what we had covered thus far (we had a week gap on the sessions due to a bank holiday) ● A summary of all the strategies they had developed was presented, and they elaborated/expanded on them more within the group. ● Weekly activity: What actions are possible to promote partnerships and support networks? What do you imagine can contribute to building support networks among teachers?
7	30/04/2022	● Theme: Uncertainty and Wobble ● Support networks with peers – summary and dialogue with what they elaborated. ● Uncertainty and wobble (Beghetto, 2020; Fecho et al., 2020) ● Dilemmas: working in small groups on a specific class dilemma using the same questions as in session 5: "What points stood out to you in this situation? What connections do you (who listened) make with this story? What issues were raised?" inspired by Fecho et al. (2020)'s framework. ● Weekly activity: Create a strategy to solve the dilemma discussed in class. Based on what we have seen so far, what questions are still open?
8	07/05/2022	● Theme: Closing ● Recap of what we discussed and seen during the sessions. ● Support networks.

As stated before, the first step of analyzing the information produced in this research involved watching the sessions multiple times to identify patterns, themes, tendencies, possible positionings, and perspective changes as we discussed the topics at hand. These topics included dialogue, the role of teachers, challenges they commonly faced at work, their worries, and experiences. We identified key themes that emerged from the data: 1. Dialogue

and dialogical practices; 2. Authority vs. authoritarianism; 3. Students' resistance; 4. Role of the institutions in conflict resolution; 5. Teachers' training.[8]

It became clear how dynamic the participants' dialogues and interactions were. They revisited previously discussed topics, and expanded on shared ideas, experiences, and concerns, each contributing to their interpretation of their work. These processes highlighted a non-linear pattern in how topics emerged and evolved. While we attempted to organize a coherent account of participants' quotations, we found that, at times, they seemed repetitive, but this is precisely because meaning-making processes are not linear. Within this context, it is essential to note that the participants were confronted with different points of view and perspectives, and our aim was not to lose sight of the coconstructive dynamics of meaning-making and its collaborative nature.

Participants initiated discussions centered on teachers' challenges and difficulties while dealing with students, especially regarding conflict situations where prejudices often arose. Therefore, the focus of our discussions was the relationships (and interactions) between teachers and students. However, there were no straightforward "teacher-student" relationships, as the presence of multiple factors prevailed. It became clear from the first session that their concerns, particularly related to conflicts, prejudices, and wobble situations, existed in the context of a kaleidoscope of other factors involved, pervading teacher-student relations. As represented in Figure 2, other intertwined people, contexts, facts, and factors situated at micro, meso, and macro levels permeated the discussions and concerns that teachers shared. These aspects and influences kept coming back whenever the topic of how they related to their students was addressed.

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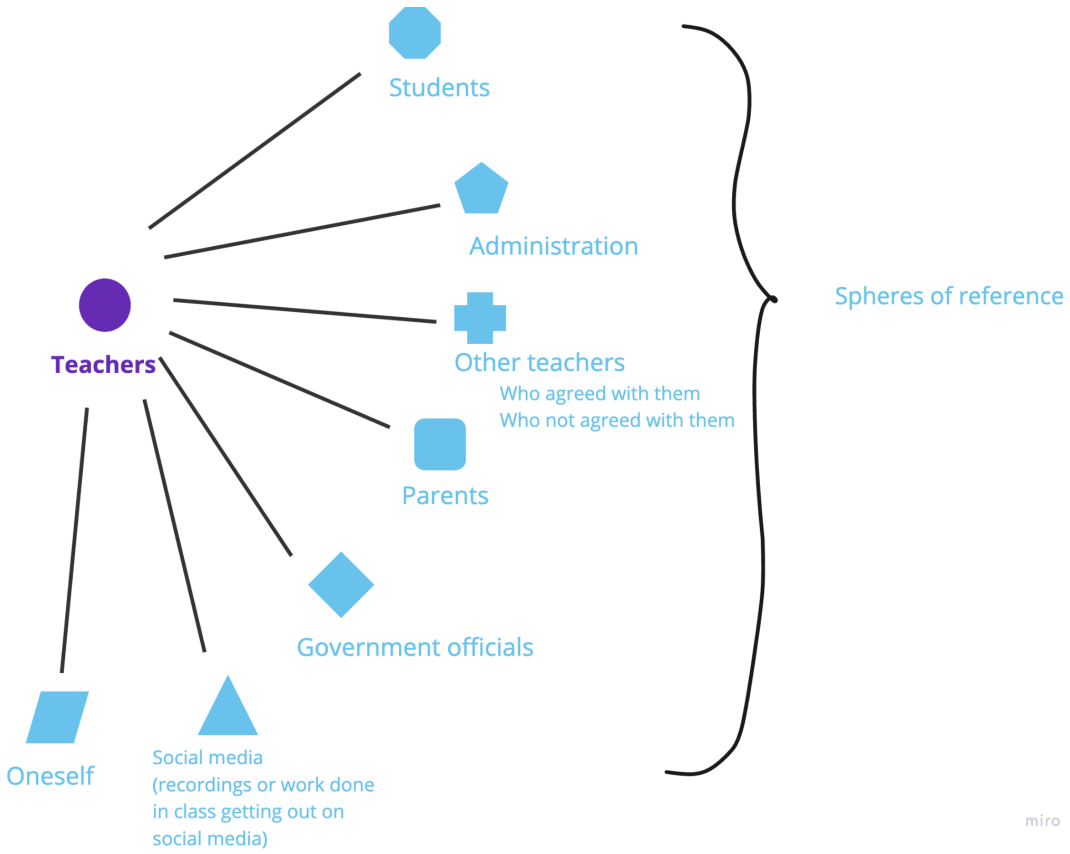
[8] *1.1. Dialogue and dialogical practices.*
1.2. Authority vs. authoritarianism: Generalized ideas of being authoritarian, being dialogical.
1.3. Student's resistance: Uncomfortable, closed students, difficulty with dialogue
1.4. Role of the institutions in conflict resolution: Lack of support from the administration; persecution from Congressmen
1.5. Teacher's training: Lack of training in relational issues, conflict resolution, or how to deal with prejudice.

The data construction considered the context of the seven spheres of reference that came up as relevant and were further explored during the sessions. They consist of topics the participants repeatedly mentioned and discussed, classified as follows: 1. Students; 2. Parents; 3. Other teachers; 4. School administration; 5. Government representatives; 6. Collective culture; 7. Oneself (Dialogical Self System).

Figure 2 Spheres of reference related to teachers' concerns



To illustrate how such complexity manifested within the group, we give an example from session 2. In the beginning, one participant mentioned some recent distressing news that a few of them were aware of. They had heard that a teacher in their county was audio recorded, without his knowledge or consent, while reprimanding a student in the classroom. Criticisms and eventual reprovals are routine occurrences in teaching. I It is part of the job to give stern lectures when students misbehave, but the consequences of this covert recording

were devastating. The recording was shared with parents, who then reported it to the administration, leading to the temporary removal of the teacher from the school.

The participants mentioned this situation as an example of what they were afraid of, of what could happen to them if they were not careful enough about what they said in class. In the teachers' evaluation of the situation, a misinterpretation of the teacher's actions occurred, which led to severe consequences. This occurrence left the participants unsure of what they could do differently, since they did not know how else the teacher could have behaved, and, by extension, how they should behave to avoid such an outcome.

Olivia shared that "[This situation] *really struck me this week, you know? I've been reflecting a lot on how* ***my*** *attitude in the classroom would have been in face of this situation. How would I have reacted to students afterward? Because it's precisely what we're discussing [here], right, the mediation of such conflicts*."

Olivia and other participants were reflecting upon something that had happened to another teacher, a colleague. So, they imagined the situation and related to it, through the lens of (1) what happened to him, (2) what could have happened to them in similar situations, and (3) how they should react.

The complexity of actual and imagined events and structural factors that affect teachers' work and personal well-being is immense. Multiple and diverse are the factors that may provoke serious problems and difficulties in teachers' daily interactions with students, school members, and the community. Therefore, this example can help us in understanding those plural aspects at play and the conflicts between teachers and students that encompass many other issues. Here, I will focus on the different and intertwined layers of the recorded scolding episode.

In that scenario, he, from his *teacher position*, criticized a student who, in turn, did not like the criticism and recorded the teacher secretly. Then *social media/cellphones* came

into the picture, spreading judgmental gossip. The recording, then, was shared with *parents* and the *administration*, which decided to act by temporarily removing the teacher from the school, due to what he had said in the classroom. But was this consequence the result of only what he said? No. It happened due to all of the complex relations and interconnections leading to a sequence of events, namely, his utterances > being recorded > students and parents being alerted > social judgments> administration actions > punitive consequence.

What might have started as a conflict between the teacher and one student did not remain so because of the interdependence of multiple relations. My point is that even when a situation does not escalate as this one did, all these aspects and relations are intricately entangled in all teachers' day-to-day practices.

The precise questions teachers raised, according to Olivia, are indicators that similar situations arise all the time and serve as stimuli for their apprehensions surrounding the repercussions of their actions in their classrooms. The critical distinction regarding the group context is that teachers seldom have opportunities to share those fears out loud with other people, to each other. And, as they put it, externalizing those fears to an audience that not only listens with attention but also relates to those same concerns allows them to better elaborate on the issue and find better ways to deal with it.

When the teachers discussed this situation, they realized how little control they had over the repercussions of their actions. The usual mandate from the administration is "Do not talk about sensitive topics. If asked, avoid. Do not respond!", and it seems to protect them. Yet as Olivia and Nicole pointed out in another session, avoiding the matter does not resolve it. The students will keep asking difficult questions, if not in their current class, in the next one. Therefore, Olivia and Nicole ended up expressing frustration in knowing that the strategy of avoiding and not engaging would not work, but they did not know what else they could do to prevent such problems.

The discussions about the teachers' roles and 'authority vs authoritarianism' revealed a broadly dichotomous perspective about many issues. Either you were a strict, rigid teacher, respected and in control of the class, or you were weak with no authority. But as we unpacked this seemingly opposing notion, it became clear that teachers had more questions than actual beliefs. For example, Theo stated that,

> *Good communication is important [for a teacher's practice nowadays], not only verbal communication, but understanding the language of the students today, their non-verbal communication as well, their body language. (...) Authority worked one way when we were students, and now it works differently when we are teachers. Today, it's much more about admiration, the student looking at the teacher and saying, "I admire this person, it's important for me to listen to this person." This generates trust (...) and is also very much based on dialogue. It's no longer about imposition, the fear of "I'll send you to the principal's office!" "I'll call your parents!" That doesn't work anymore; the dialogue is different.*

Theo introduces the idea of a generational difference between teachers and their students. For him, in his educational trajectory, the imposition of authority through fear and threats was much more pronounced, and he argues that this approach does not work with students anymore. Following this point, Elsa and Amanda jumped into the conversation to share their agreement with Theo, but, for them, school rules, and how vertically imposed they were, are even more problematic. They mentioned the rigid rule about the use of bathrooms, for example, and how that is violent toward trans students. To that, Alex argued that rules were what kept the peace and respect between teachers and students, and rules were the pathway to much-needed harmony and discipline in every student's life. Politely, but firmly, Amanda and Elsa disagreed with this perspective. Elsa said "*It's interesting, Alex, you, coming from a different background, [have] a very specific view of authority, while Amanda and I have a quite different perspective. So, we also talked a bit about the idea of reconstructing, building a concept of authority, right? What is our individual view of this authority, what does authority mean, and how we can reframe it so that it has a positive impact in the classroom?"*

To that, Alex answered,

> *I found it interesting that you all said that active activities (sic) contribute to the development of responsible citizens and (...), inducing competencies. This ultimately boils down to meaning-construction (emphasis). This opens a range of authorities, where you talk a lot about dialogue, as Theo articulated well, there needs to be dialogue. This model of authority has changed; it has shifted from being highly vertical to being horizontal (...). That is stipulated today, (...) is built through dialogue. So, nothing more, nothing less... I want to establish rules: let's talk, let's set rules then, a limit. Let's limit what is allowed and what is not allowed.*

Expanding on his background, he added: "*I must correct myself [referring to changing his mind from what the group was discussing] because I wasn't a good student, (...) I was almost expelled from school because of my behavior, despite a strict background, obeying rules, but I wasn't the guy who followed the rules to the letter [which had negative consequences for me]. So, this makes us reflect precisely because it was good, I learned a lot in [these] ten short minutes [listening to you].*"

Alex came from a strict educational background and mentioned in other instances in the group how he faced scolding, and other sorts of strict rule reinforcement in his life. He believed his upbringing contributed to his personal growth. While Alex acknowledges the importance of dialogue, there is a question about whether his perspective truly embraces openness or not. It appears that he still prioritizes rule enforcement despite hearing others' viewpoints on promoting dialogue. In group discussions, he sometimes agreed with the general ideas being discussed, but his positionings and ideas were impregnated with ambivalence and ambiguity about how much dialogical practices resonated with his values and convictions. Therefore, tensions between perspectives were identified in the meetings, their occurrence emerging from both verbalized disagreements, as well as instances where an agreement was seemingly reached at the surface, but a sense of resistance was also expressed by participants.

Nevertheless, there were clear indicators that the participants let themselves hear perspectives different from their own and were affected by them. For example, take the sentence "*I learned a lot in [these] ten short minutes [hearing you]*" by Alex. Or Elsa's "*I hadn't thought of this in this way before*" and "*It really made me think throughout this week*," and "*I've learned a lot from you all now*," expressed by Theo. Naomi summarized her ideas by saying that the meetings were "a moment for us to be heard, right? By peers who are experiencing the same situation, even though in different realities. At school we don't have time (emphasis) for this."

Exploring and analyzing the power of generalizations helps the researcher examine the movements of positionings and perspectives adopted by participants in the context of micro-moments, offering insights into the broader picture (meso and macro levels) within which the teachers work. By closely examining these positioning movements, we gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play and their implications. At a microgenetic level, we can observe and analyze the shifts in perspective with more precision. Considering the research objectives, microgenetic analyses allow us to spot when new perspectives emerged, when participants voiced their points of view, and how these changed, shifted, or not, during interactions. Using a microgenetic lens, we were able to demonstrate and document the coconstruction of knowledge among participants, the brainstorming/exploration of ideas and perspectives, complements, contrasts, and the emergence of new perspectives and new knowledge. Below, two episodes were selected for microgenetic analysis as we focus on such interactions.

Zooming-in on perspectives' emergence

Episode 1 – This occurred during session 2. This interactive sequence was previously addressed in the general analysis. However, we believe it to be valuable to conduct a more

detailed examination to comprehend the various perspectives that emerged, how they mutually enhanced each other, and the instances of tension. This closer examination will also focus on analyzing the participants' contributions to the conversation.

Episode 1

Olivia: *This week was really tough. I don't know if everyone from [city x] heard about an audio recording of a teacher that leaked. He was talking about the third year of a school, and he was addressing the students in class, because the class was very difficult. One of the students recorded the audio, and the teacher addressed the students in a very polite manner. But the student's intention at that moment was to share the audio so that the teacher would be exposed in some way, right?*

And this audio caused such a stir (...) it reached a point where the teacher was suspended. He is undergoing psychological counseling now, and the students are also receiving psychological support.

But I found it such a draining and complicated situation because he is a colleague and a beloved teacher. Sometimes I think we - I believe the pandemic also contributed to this - but I think the exhaustion of the students in the classroom and the teachers is extreme.

And students are returning to the classroom with a very different attitude than before. I understand [this context], but it's so draining for [teachers] to mediate certain situations, and this teacher ended up, like every human being, getting blown up.

But he blew up in a very polite manner. (...) So I think this really struck me this week, you know? I've been reflecting a lot on how my attitude in the classroom might be in face of this situation. How would I have reacted with the students afterwards? Because it's precisely what we're discussing [here], right, the mediation of such conflicts.

He is currently suspended. We don't know if he will return to this class or to teach at all.

And then there were other cases from other colleagues that had repercussions this week that made me think, wow, so many cases in just one week. Everything is coming to the surface, you know?

Theo: *Just sharing about the teacher that our colleague here [Olivia] mentioned, he's a science teacher, right? So, he's quite famous here in [the city], he has 30 years of experience, and is a very beloved guy, but unfortunately, he's going through this difficulty that anyone could face, right? I'm sending positive thoughts and rooting for him so that he can regain his balance and the respect he truly deserves, and can get back to his practice, which is exemplary for 30 years in his profession.*

Alex: *Yeah, I've never been through that situation as a teacher, where someone records or uses a phone in the classroom without permission, because when I enter the classroom,*

one of the rules, precisely, I allow cell phones, even if the school doesn't permit it, but everything has a time and a place… (pause).

And in this process of raising awareness among students in all classes, even in this return [from online classes to in person classes], dialogue is very important because they are already automatically engaged in using their phones all the time, so limiting it to using it for a specific activity or doing something extra (emphasis), is really complicated nowadays.

But this rule is established right at the beginning of the class, why? Because my method of evaluating students has always been different from other teachers because I assess attendance, participation, integration, communication, and my evaluation is based on what is said in the classroom, so if the student misses the timing of the class or isn't interested in the lesson, they practically miss the content of the class.

And if they engage in another activity that is not related to the class activity, as my class is very hands-on, they also lose focus (...).

So, the use of cell phones in the classroom, in my classes, is, well, they are useful, there's a right time to check if there are any messages, something important (...)

All of this is talked about [with students]. And I'm sad that in this situation, any teacher, regardless of the field (...) is recorded (...), exposed, and is affected due to the detriment of technology (sic). So, I'm upset about this, and I think we also need to pay attention in the classroom to reduce doubts, conflicts, and deal with them immediately so that there isn't an escalation of this disrespect as [Olivia and Theo] mentioned.

Vivian: *In my case, when I started my teaching practice, [right in the first months there was a] strike. (...) I live on the same street as the school, so when I was walking by, doing some errands, I met a student who asked me, "Teacher, when are we going back [to school]?" I said, "Guys, we're on strike…," and you know, but with the new High School curriculum, we are teaching an introduction to the world of the labor market. And that's what they asked me about it, they said, "No, teacher, what about this? Explain this strike issue and all that."*

And I didn't know how to say it with (...) tact. I'm afraid of saying something that they might interpret differently. And that's it, I'm still very much [asking myself] "How should I say it? How should I say it?", I think my approach is very much about observing and trying to understand; now, taking action, a stance, I still don't feel confident about that. I don't feel confident about not making things worse, you know...

Analysis of Episode 1

As stated before, Olivia expresses concern and uncertainty about what to do in the situation. Theo joins her concern but perhaps not as intensely. He offers a perspective that is more centered on hope, expressing his sympathy for the teacher's predicament. He also

acknowledges the fact that it could have happened to anyone, as any teacher is subject to this. To that view, Alex cuts in, stating that he has never experienced such a situation before. He gives the impression that, on the contrary, he would never be subjected to a situation like that.

The tone shifts from contemplating the possibility of being in a similar situation to a social experience of group tension. It becomes apparent that Alex feels exempt from this kind of problem because of his own set of rules. Despite his seemingly aloof attitude, Alex admits to being upset and saddened by what has occurred to that teacher. However, he remains steadfast in his belief that there is a simple solution to this issue: establishing rules. Tension, then, emerged not only between the participants' perspectives but most likely due to Alex's rigid point of view. His enunciations suggested that if teachers knew what to do—like establishing and demanding students to follow rules—things like that would never occur. In fact, it is not clear when Alex is resisting others' ideas, and the moments when it seems those ideas are getting to him, they are trespassing the barriers of his deep-rooted previous beliefs.

Accentuating this tension, Vivian's immediate comment disregards Alex's assertion, as she brings up an example of the exact type of concern Olivia and Theo were talking about. She recounts an encounter she had with a student where she hesitated, not knowing how to respond to the student's question, afraid that he might misinterpret her, and wondered about the repercussions in case he did so. Hence, while Alex voiced a perspective that there are clear foolproof ways to prevent a situation like that the teacher suffered, Vivian went back to the perspective of wobble, highlighting the existence of wobble experiences when teachers do not know what to do in problematic, challenging situations.

It is important to note that, as we show in Episode 3, the generalized sentiment of certainty that some teachers and administrators voice does not sit well with some participants. Claiming certainty through generalized phrases like "This will *not* happen if you only do X" (X usually means not engaging with the problem, ignoring hard questions, etc.) can have two

consequences. First, it shames teachers who are unable to achieve the desired results despite their best efforts, leaving them in a state of distressed uncertainty. Second, it is a misguided assumption that a simple strategy guarantees that teachers will not have conflicts in their classes. Such certainty does not automatically prevent any problems or contribute to finding solutions. What this research indicates is that we have better results when we allow space for uncertainty to exist and be met with reflection. It is beneficial to take the time to contemplate, wonder, question, and gain a deeper understanding of the issues at hand—and how we relate to those issues—without jumping to quick solutions.

Episode 2 – Session 6 began with a brief review of the topics we had discussed so far. Because of a holiday in the previous week, we had a 15-day gap between the meetings, so, the retrospective account served as a strategy to facilitate a smooth transition to new topics and re-establish the flow of discussions. After that, I asked the teachers if there was anything they would like to add. They brought in questions related to examples in which their autonomy to do their work was eliminated or challenged. Examples connected to what was discussed in session 2 about their fears regarding how to mediate conflicts with students. Below, is the transcription of group interactions, followed by Figure 3, which provides an in-depth analysis of the episode.

Episode 2

Nicole: *I would like to talk about something that happened regarding racism and gender issues (...). I was planning to do a panel with the children about "Did you know?" Did you know that there is a law [about racial…]. And [the secretary] said that I couldn't [do this activity, since] it could be seen as a offensive within the community (...). Then there was a confrontation, some teachers were saying, "Why talk about black people here!?". I said,* ***"What do you mean****, guys!?" (emphasis) Brazil... and especially within a community! But anyway, since I realized that I was alone and that I could face (...) certain retaliation, I didn't do it, but I still talk to my students about it, you know... about the law (emphasis), about the issue of indigenous culture and African people, how they came here (...) but I was really uncomfortable because it's impossible not to talk about this, you know.*

Elsa: *I think this greatly affects our practice in the classroom, you know, even the insecurities that were already there, like the ones [Nicole] mentioned (...),* ***why should we talk about black history!? The nerve!*** *Within a community where we have an entire* ***history*** *built in this community (emphasis), the* ***favelas*** *of Brazil, practically everything in the post-abolition period, so there's all this* ***historical construction****, how can we not talk about it, you know? And then* ***I think this issue of not speaking precisely because of the fear of how it might reverberate*** *comes up (...). It's a constant problem, especially at this moment in our politics, where there's such marked polarization.*

Theo: *I'm just putting it in the chat to illustrate, okay? A document from the BNCC, which is the national curriculum guideline[it says this issue]* ***must be worked at all grade levels*** *(...), even to support colleagues who mentioned having issues teaching this topic in the classroom. (...) The appreciation of African and indigenous culture is supported in this document, and teachers have the support to work on it at all grade levels. (...). Actually, teachers should answer (emphasis) to the education department if they don't (emphasis) work on [these topics], just to see (...) how the reality we face in schools sometimes differs from what's on paper, in the document.*

Luciana: *Definitely, Theo, thank you for bringing this up (...)*

Olivia: *I think that, you know****, my reality is quite different because I work in private institutions****, it's... I am* ***restricted*** *from various subjects about which* ***I cannot speak****. And since I [teach] English classes, I have to choose the [material] Im going to use in the classroom very carefully, (...) so that the text doesn't generate double meanings in the classroom. Double meaning (...) regarding any (emphasis)* ***controversial subject****. So, it's quite complicated (emphasis) because text interpretation is very broad, you know, and at every moment you have to manage situations that will (pause) generate (pause) some (pause) controversy.*

Sometimes, as our colleague [Theo] mentioned, it's in the BNCC that I must work on these topics, but it's very limited. I think that the public education system has some issues, but I believe there is still greater (emphasis) freedom, because whether the teacher likes it or not, they won't be fired if they say something that doesn't please everyone. When you work in private institutions, if you discuss a controversial topic and a student goes home and portrays it differently, showing it to their parents, it creates a huge problem, and often private institutions, in general, are not supportive of the professionals, the teachers there. At least that's how I see it, I have to be very careful (emphasis) about everything I say, the way I say it, the manner in which I speak, so that there aren't two, three, four interpretations.

Luciana: *Thank you, Olivia. Before I give the mic to you Elsa, I am asking myself if it's possible to make a selection [of contents] that doesn't leave room for interpretations. How can I ensure that an misinterpretation won't (emphasis) occur? How can I guarantee that a topic won't emerge in the classroom? Can we have that level of control?*

Elsa: *I wanted to comment exactly on what Olivia said about not being able to talk about subjects x, y, and z in private schools. I wonder what kind of education these schools are proposing for these students if we can't address societal issues they live in. How can they become informed citizens when they are completely restricted from reflecting socially and critically about the society they live in? To me, this makes no sense at all. In my English*

class (...), I'm only supposed to learn grammar, the very basic interpretation of what the school wants me to understand, so that I can later reproduce it for what? A test? The national exams, the college entrance exams, and is that it? What exactly are we trying to shape in these schools?

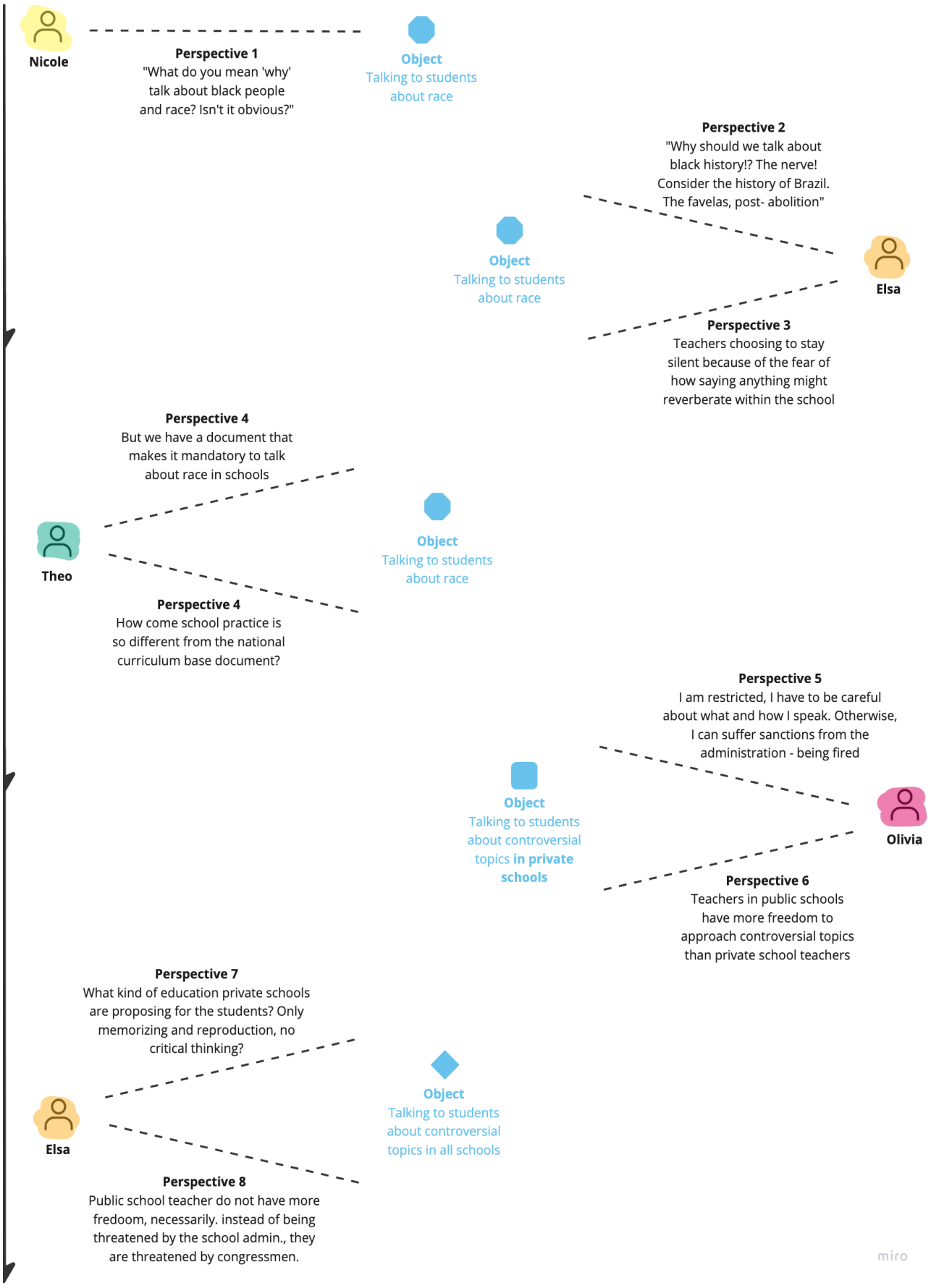
I also think (emphasis) about what Olivia mentioned concerning public schools where we supposedly have more freedom. Although the persecution might not come directly from the administration, (...) sometimes here in the State, we have specific individuals, like congressmen Y, Z (...) who are even suing teachers when they address issues of ethnic diversity, sexual diversity in the classroom (...). These new generations already come with this reflection and these questionings almost intrinsicly, so we can no longer escape from it... So, I think about how impoverished our education becomes when we limit (emphasis) topics that are so rich for us.

Theo: *Actually, it's good to talk about "flowers" too, right, about positive experiences. It's interesting because here at the Department of Education [in my State] …* [here he proceeds to give an example in which talking about race in a private school was successful].

The following figure (Figure 3) is a visual representation of this episode. On the far-left side, a horizontal arrow symbolizes the timeline, and teachers' quotes are indicated along this arrow. The teacher who speaks first is positioned at the top, followed by the next teacher below, and so forth. The object of discussion is represented by the blue hexagon. As the object changes through the conversation, it changes its form.

The interaction starts with **Nicole** (yellow), saying that she was going to do an activity with her students about racial issues, but was not authorized to do so by the school secretary with the support of other teachers, hence the lack of the teacher's autonomy. The **object** (blue) of the discussion starts as "talking to students about race." The interaction follows with inputs from **Elsa** (orange), **Theo** (green), and **Olivia** (pink) about the topic. Each presents their perspective, indicated in Figure Z by a dotted line, accompanied by a caption below the line.

Figure 3 Episode 2 perspectives in movement (next page)


Nicole
Perspective 1
"What do you mean 'why' talk about black people and race? Isn't it obvious?"
Object
Talking to students about race
Perspective 2
"Why should we talk about black history!? The nerve! Consider the history of Brazil. The favelas, post- abolition"
Object
Talking to students about race
Elsa
Perspective 3
Teachers choosing to stay silent because of the fear of how saying anything might reverberate within the school
Perspective 4
But we have a document that makes it mandatory to talk about race in schools
Theo
Object
Talking to students about race
Perspective 4
How come school practice is so different from the national curriculum base document?
Perspective 5
I am restricted, I have to be careful about what and how I speak. Otherwise, I can suffer sanctions from the administration - being fired
Object
Talking to students about controversial topics in private schools
Olivia
Perspective 6
Teachers in public schools have more freedom to approach controversial topics than private school teachers
Perspective 7
What kind of education private schools are proposing for the students? Only memorizing and reproduction, no critical thinking?
Object
Talking to students about controversial topics in all schools
Elsa
Perspective 8
Public school teacher do not have more fredoom, necessarily. instead of being threatened by the school admin., they are threatened by congressmen.
miro

Analysis of Episode 2

At first, the aspect that particularly stood out in this interactional sequence was the way participants addressed the disparities between public and private schools. This had already piqued my interest during the meetings and continued to captivate my attention upon reviewing the recordings. The reason I was intrigued by this exchange stemmed from Olivia's reaction to Elsa's contribution. Olivia seemed very convinced that public school teachers had more freedom to speak about controversial topics. She effectively conveyed the notion that she felt constrained and subjected to more rigid regulations and control within a private school. However, Elsa introduced a perspective to the conversation that seemed new to Olivia. By voicing the fact that public school teachers, despite having the security of a civil servant, could still have their job stability threatened by congresspeople. Elsa challenged Olivia's assumption, explaining that such freedom was not as broad as people imagined. This was a view on the subject Olivia had not considered before.

Later in the meeting, Olivia remarked, *"[The meetings] make us learn about other realities, everyone's realities here. I always have this feeling that on Saturdays I am learning more.*" She displayed a sense of awe in response to this newfound perspective, acknowledging that she had not previously considered this angle. As a result, the change in the group's mood and motivation to open their minds to new ideas was palpable, indicated both verbally and nonverbally by most participants.

Additional nuances resulting from the microgenetic analysis were identified. By taking a closer look at the whole interaction, we verified a slight change/development of the topic of discussion. This change began with Nicole's statement regarding "talking to students about race" as she voiced her frustrations with being barred from speaking with her students. Elsa follows her statement by expressing resonance with Nicole's frustration and indignation regarding the prohibition of teachers from discussing race, considering the importance of

addressing racial issues in Brazil, with its sociohistorical background. Subsequently, Theo introduced a perspective related to legislation and the legal framework supporting discussions on such topics within Brazilian schools. This contribution prompted Olivia to acknowledge the legislation Theo was referring to, yet she pointed out the practical restrictions and limitations imposed by the school administration. In private institutions, she believed she had less freedom than in public schools to address not only matters of race but sensitive topics in general.

This was the point where the topic of discussion changed. The *aboutness* of what they were discussing changed from "talking to students about race" to "talking to students about controversial topics in schools." Olivia and Elsa introduced their views concerning controversial topics within schools, private and/or public. Teachers face reprimands and constraints either way, no matter where they teach. In private schools, limitations come from administration and parents' demands, and in public schools, pressure comes from public officers, congresspeople, and local politicians. This episode, therefore, illustrates the coconstruction of meaning-making and the process of reevaluating previous assumptions and perspectives.

Episode 3 - This episode took place in session 5 and was prompted by the presentation of an excerpt from the documentary "When I feel that I already know." This edited excerpt depicted a conflict situation between two young students. It featured a student, approximately nine to ten years old, visibly upset with a friend. Another student of about the same age assumed the role of mediator, as part of the school's designated student roles, who, after seeing the conflict, went to talk to the upset student. The documentary shows interactions between these two students – the upset individual and the mediator – as well as statements from both following the mediation. They expressed how supported they felt to have one

another, and that they could find understanding with each other in ways that, sometimes, adults cannot offer.

After watching this video, participants engaged in subgroup discussions around three questions: "What points stood out to you in this situation? What connections do you make with this story? What issues were raised?", questions inspired by Fecho et al.'s framework (2020). After that, they were invited back into the main room and asked to share what they discussed with the whole group. This set the stage for the following interactions:

Episode 3

Amanda: *I'm here thinking, [as] Theo was saying, about politics. Within the school things end up being very political. The supervisors [administrators] (...) are always from the same exclusive group. (...) Then if you come [with a proposal], "Look, guys, let's do something different." "Let's try to set up a student union. These kids are old enough, 15, 16 years old. They can already think for themselves." [We hear from them] "No. That won't work, forget it."*

And what happens? Nothing. (...) We always hear, "That's not going to work.' And we don't do anything. We don't [even] know if it's going to work. So, I get kind of like this... (gets emotional) And we don't try anything new. No new projects are attempted, and we don't try something new. And we carry on with education like this, you know?

Investing? Why? There's no need to invest in poor people's children, right? (sarcasm) Why do we need to invest in these kids? They're used as pawns by congressmen (sarcasm).

[This] makes me sadder every day... I really have no hope... Some days I have a little bit of hope, but the next day it dies, you know?

Vivian: *Yeah, I'm in a city that has a very big stigma [of violence] (...). So we're constantly living with police patrols and violence, and the students bring this into the classroom, their stories. Many of them say things like this that leave me... (speechless).*

I was moved while Amanda was speaking, because it's (...) hard for me as a teacher, and as a human being, because I came from a public school, from the outskirts, I was a problematic student, and I heard from the school counselor that I wouldn't amount to anything, you know? She said that to my mother. And then I managed to go to college, to take graduate courses and yet, when I'm in the classroom, all of that comes back like, you won't amount to anything, you are incompetent.

It hurts, you know? These are things that we hear from school. And then Amanda speaking, wow (gets emotional), I couldn't even control myself, so, sorry, guys, because that's it. It hurts, guys. Violence isn't just a slap in the face. I think verbal violence is much worse,

because you carry it for the rest of your life. And then, how can we think of a school that thinks this is normal?

Theo comments in the chat, touched by what Vivian said, about Bourdieu and his perspective of the school being a space for the reproduction of social structures, for the transfer of capital, and how this relates to students' performance in the classroom. After Vivian spoke, Theo turned on the microphone to add on.

Theo: *Sorry, guys, I'm talking too much, but it's just that this topic is the topic that brought me to the course, actually. As I mentioned in our first meeting, I really want (...) to go back to studying, to do a master's degree. Because with the "new High School" (...) now we have as a mandatory component the 'life plan."*[9] *[Which is] super interesting! It's beautiful on paper, being able to resolve students' conflicts throughout High School [the process].*

The [student] having support there to build their life project after High School, whether it's professional education, continuing to work, or academic life, [having] support to think about a life's project. That's perfect.

But what preparation did we have (emphatic pause) to deal with students' life projects?

And if those students, from a school like Amanda's, end up in the hands of a teacher who is going to say, as they've already said to Vivian, as they've already told Amanda, (...) 'If you just don't go into violent paths, be happy, forget about school! Go find [a job], stonemason, [a contractor]" - not devaluing those professions, okay? - but it is what we hear, like, "If you don't go into violence, well, be happy, public well-funded university it's not for you, okay? Don't even gtry, it's not worth your time."

[The teacher who does this] is hindering the process, he's creating more conflicts. The life project is beautiful (...) [but] the teacher needs to be prepared, to work with yearnings, to work with [the students'] dreams.

So, I mean, I'm going to show the student a reality. Sometimes I'll tell them about the difficulties they may encounter in the process, but without inhibiting dreams.

The life project in the "new High School" (...) cannot just be thrown into the school, there has to be preparation for these teachers to know how to work with these desires, because otherwise, Luciana and colleagues, the conflict won't be resolved. It accumulates! It perpetuates itself, as we said, with differentiated access for families from different social classes, because at the [expensive private] school, the life project will have resources, right?

[I know of private schools] setting up individual care, group care, visits, bringing in students, bringing in professionals (...). A lot of [private universities] are looking for [those schools] to set up partnerships to take part in the life project, because they see it as a channel to get these students enrolled in the private institutions. And do they go to Amanda's school? This private institution?

[9] The "life plan", which translated literally from the Portuguese "*projeto de vida*" would be "life project." This was a facet of the previous government's initiative, the "new High School," (*Novo Ensino Médio*) that asked students from both public and private institutions to plan their post-high school careers.

If we don't have the training to do this, if it were simply for the teacher to sit down, listen, and speak his mind, it could further increase the conflicts and this [inequality] we've been discussing here.

It's great that you, Vivian and Amanda, are such examples of overcoming, of having had someone who put you down and you said, "No, wait a minute. That's not ok!" (...), but sometimes other people might not have that psychological strength (...) to face this adverse situation. (...) This life project in High School can be a great tool, but it can also be a huge misstep if we don't have the right professional training to work on it.

Eric: *How difficult it is to break this pattern, you know (...) that society tries to impose that education has to follow a standard. But there is no such standard, because we are different people. We're in different contexts, we think differently. And they want to demand a standard of us, how harmful that is… (...)*

It was even something that Vivian and Naomi brought up in our group (...) how the most difficult thing is teaching autonomy to the student.

Because it's not just about teaching content, it's about teaching students to think critically and to be autonomous in their decisions, but how do we do that?

All the other reflections that Theo and Amanda brought up [now] also ended up impacting my thinking [at this moment]. How am I going to bring this autonomy to my students if I, as a teacher, see my colleagues beside me saying, "What a silly task you're doing" and "You're wasting your time, you have to get to the classroom, give your ABCs and leave already. You don't have to do anything beyond that."

And then, how can I motivate others when behind the scenes I'm also being demotivated? That me and my group reflected about, and now that I bring it up, these different perspectives, but that at the end of the day [I'm thinking] how [these different perspectives] reflect on what we do...

Amanda: *It's very difficult... Yeah, the big problem is what Eric just said, right? I was trying to think of an image, (...) we are... we leave [the meetings] here with a lot of [ideas]. On Saturday afternoon we're buzzing with ideas! On Monday morning we arrive at school and we're dragged (emphasis) down.*

Because when we are confronted with reality, things completely change. You hear, "Stop fooling around, you're not going to change this." "You're not going to make it."

Especially when you work in public schools. Autonomy is a word that exists in Paulo Freire's book. In reality, it doesn't exist.

We don't have that autonomy, we have a curriculum (...) to follow.

There's no such thing as autonomy. Your projects are put off for another time. And it becomes very difficult (...) to deal with the students (...) because there's a curriculum to follow So, it's a complicated situation. If someone has the answer [to how to stimulate student autonomy when the teacher has no autonomy], sell it!

Theo: *The discussion today was deep, right? I found it quite intense.*

I think I'm going to be a bit of a dreamer in my comment because I'm a very optimistic guy, you know? But I think what mobilized us was seeking out this group. It was going to the teachers' lounge and showing that we were not satisfied (emphasis) with the situation.

And if you've looked for this course, if you've looked for a reading [references] that we've mentioned here (...) and saw there, "wow, this is tough, man, but it must be a way. I'll go for it!"

It's exciting to be a part of this group because it always sparks lots of ideas for me. Amanda, I have the same feeling of arriving on Monday - which is a day when I teach seven classes in a row. Sometimes there are seven lectures one after another, I think "Man, what a demagogue, you know? On Saturday I'm talking about all sorts of wonderful ideas and on Monday I'm here telling myself there's no time to develop anything."

but [it does make me] realize that we're not alone... That Vivian there in [x state], going through a strike, that Maya there in [x state], that Nicole (...), they are reflecting on the same things that I am, so I'm not alone in this!

Sometimes you get to the teachers' room and they even joke with you, "Oh, you're meeting with this group of teachers? [Or you're doing another continued training?] For what? That's nonsense. Just go teach your class and that's it," but no, there are other people [who care, for whom it is not nonsense]!

It's that old tale where the forest is on fire, all the animals are feeling from the fire, and there's a hummingbird that's going to the river to get a drop of water and throw it on the fire (...) the [other] animals say, "Stop being foolish, for God's sake, it's on fire there, get away from there." [The hummingbird responds] "No, I'm doing my part. I need others to go down to the river and get some water and throw it on the fire too. But if I don't throw my little drop, I'll lose hope and I won't make it."

So, I think that drop by drop, as we're doing here - I don't know if we're going to change... [maybe] it's having too much of rose-colored glasses - but at least it can do us good, you know? Waking up in the morning and knowing "I am practicing a different educational standard, that I believe in."

I think this is the sentiment, having you guys (emphasis), knowing that there are other hummingbirds in this forest is what encourages me to try to change the seven classes of the day. It's been really good for me [to be here]. Thank you, guys.

Naomi: *Just to add to what Theo just said. When I participated in an interventional project at the school I work at [to help a student with learning difficulties], I brought it to the entire administration team, right? And then, when they said, "No, Naomi. It won't work, it won't work." it was like a bucket of cold water. I said, "No problem, can I take this small step here?" [They said] "You can." And I did. And let me tell you, how [it made a difference to the student's learning]. (...) For me, that's a boost, you know? And being here [in the group] also helps us a lot, reinvigorates our energy, because it's not easy to keep hearing complaints and pushback all the time. It's not easy to just do nothing.*

Analysis of Episode 3

This episode has the potential to illuminate the possibility of holding multiple perspectives and feelings associated with various deeply rooted beliefs. The participants and I recognized the depth and centrality of the discussion, well summarized by Theo's final comments. The discussion strongly mobilized us affectively. It touched on topics that were dear to everyone in different ways. At that moment in our meetings, we had developed a collective trust that made it possible for feelings to emerge in the way that they did: complex, multifaceted strong feelings concerning the difficulties encountered by teachers in general.

Amanda's frustration regarding the introduction of new actions and ideas served as a common thread throughout the conversation, as other participants shared how they also encountered impediments and obstacles posed by the schools' administrations and colleagues. Amanda's discouragement resonated in Vivian's, Eric's, and Theo's statements. They elaborated on feelings of frustration, despair, anger, and puzzlement regarding the permanent discouragement messages and rules enforced or suggested by school administrators and fellow teachers. They questioned why proposing different practices or approaches to deal with students or to teach was considered so undesirable or inappropriate, entailing such resistance from the administration. Yet, amidst their frustrations, t glimpses of motivation surfaced and were attributed to their possibility of discussing the subject with other teachers, dialoguing on common difficulties, motivations, and possible strategies.

According to Amanda, initially, her perspective was filled with discouragement and hopelessness, things would not change for administrators, who would never open their minds to support novel proposals; yet she said that our meetings helped to inspire her with such possibilities, and she felt "*a little hope."* We can conclude that even amidst her disbelief and discouragement, her motivation brought her to participate in and benefit from the meetings. She still cared about finding ways to move out of traditional modes of teaching and relating

to her students, although in this episode, hopelessness seemed stronger than hope regarding the concrete possibilities of this happening, which was not the same for the other participants.

Vivian, for example, shared similar frustrations as she added another layer related to the collective culture of her workplace. She drew connections between the pervasive violence surrounding her school community, including police patrols and students' accounts of violence, to her own past experiences as a student who was put down by teachers. She linked her personal experience to a subtle form of violence that is nonetheless ingrained in day-to-day interactions within schools. She referred to it as *psychological* violence, what we may consider relational and structural violence. That is, the systematic dominant pattern of relating to one another conveyed by actions and words that communicate values of dominance and control so prevailing in our society.

As Vivian and Amanda eloquently expressed, the collective culture's values at play in society are individualism and authoritarianism, which maintain the status quo as it is within schools. Theo then discussed the policy that was being implemented in Brazil, known as the "new High School" curriculum (abandoned by the present government). He made a compelling argument that even well-meaning policies like that, which seemed promising on paper, could have terrible repercussions if teachers do not have opportunities to examine and challenge their own beliefs. Theo pointed out that without this reflective process, through teacher training processes, conflicts and inequalities would remain.

It is worth noting that at that moment, we were actively engaged in the process of examining and challenging our beliefs. This was not done through lectures, or a vertical exposure of theoretical ideas, arguments, or policies. Instead, we intentionally created a space for ontological dialogues, where different perspectives, doubts, and uncertainties could emerge, multiple perspectives converging or eventually clashing with one another within a constructive metacommunicative frame that we label as a positive *"affective-semiotic*

atmosphere" (see Discussion). This is the arduous work of examining beliefs, welcoming diverse perspectives, and slowly reflecting upon/questioning one's own values.

Another interesting aspect worth mentioning about this episode is the prevalence of discouraging messages expressed by many participants. Phrases such as "Why bother?" "Why are you trying to do this, it is not worth it," or "Just teach your class and leave." were almost caricatural, meaning they were deeply generalized. They were the voices of a "generalized other." They did not come from a specific voice, they were integrated into the collective culture's discourse. Questioning this discourse, Eric raised the issue of autonomy, introducing an intriguing twist to the conversation. He argued that even if teachers want to stimulate students' critical thinking and autonomy, how can they do that if they are *not* autonomous themselves, being constantly told what to do, and also bound by the directives of the administration? This creates an ongoing cycle of reproduction and conformity.

In this episode, multiple "truths," beliefs, and feelings were expressed. As Eric explained his line of questioning, he maintained the view that teachers should not have to always "follow the established patterns." However, Amanda challenged his view by saying that such autonomy is not possible, only existing "in Paulo Freire's books," and not in the reality of teachers' practice. This tension between perspectives became more pronounced with Theo's subsequent statement of hope. For Theo, his hope came from the sense that he was not alone in his concerns, not feeling like the only one with such problems.

This episode, therefore, sheds light on the complex and multifaceted feelings that emerged in response to the challenges and difficulties teachers usually face in schools. It shows how intertwined those feelings are, and how affectivity is a complex dimension entangled with semiotic processes that often oscillate in different and simultaneous directions. In this case, it was possible to observe the constant movement between

expressions of hopelessness, frustration, encouragement, and motivation to implement changes.

The hope and encouragement that Theo and Naomi externalized by the end of the episode do not appear to stem from an overly naive optimism. Instead, it appears to be a result of a (collective) process of meaning-making during the interactions among the participants. When individuals are exposed to and allowed to engage with viewpoints that differ from their own, something significant can happen if their defenses/resistances are lowered, allowing for an openness to be affected by the other. In this case, they managed to challenge their preconceived notions and beliefs, in a way that did not seem to trigger defensiveness. That facilitated the path to new perspectives and possible shifts.

These perspectives may not have been entirely unfamiliar to them but emerged as a novel, possible perspective at that moment. The synthesis of the feelings and experiences they shared was not an "either/or" spectrum – either hope or frustration, either demotivation or encouragement. Rather, it was a "both/and" spectrum, both motivation *and* discouragement, hope and frustration, as transitional, tentative movements towards possible clear-cut changes.

However, one aspect that is not possible to see in this type of analysis is how each participant synthesized the novel affective-semiotic information experienced in the group, which led them to draw broader conclusions or internalization processes. It would be important to ascertain whether they reached a point of actual internalization of different meanings or perspectives after discussing/reflecting on specific subjects. To gain a better understanding of such possibilities, we now turn our attention to a vertical analysis of the information, which may allow us to track two participants' possible changes (or shifts) throughout the sessions (time).

Vertical Analysis

In this section, we focus on two participants over the course of the sessions. The data was constructed from the focus groups and the interview, pinpointing participants' perspectives and positionings regarding conflicts and uncertainties they faced in their practice. Although three participants were interviewed, Maya's and Elsa's cases were selected due to their meaning-making processes being particularly enlightening regarding the shifts in their perspectives concerning (a) managing uncertainties in conflict situations involving sensitive topics; and (b) perceived possibilities for implementing specific actions and social practices in such contexts.

We transcribed all instances in which Maya and Elsa contributed to the group discussion to have an overview of their engagement with the topics. These transcripts were organized into two separate files, one for each participant, alongside the complete interview transcription. Then, in an iterative review of these transcripts, we carefully selected the most relevant excerpts to proceed with a systematic analysis of each participant's perspectives and positionings. Then an account of each participant's journey and progression throughout the meetings was given.

Maya

Maya is a sociology teacher who worked with High School-level students for more than 10 years. In the first session, she explained that her interest in being there was due to a rise in violence in her community. She noticed a significant growth in "*neo-fascist groups (...) a lot of hate, a lot of difficulty in living with diversity"* —already mentioning aspects of the collective culture, and added,

> *My county has a very high rate of violence against women; we have very serious cases in this regard. (...) We have a high rate of suicide, especially among young people, so these are issues that deeply distress me. (...) And as the teacher mentioned earlier, you go to the teachers' lounge, and it's as if nothing is happening.*

This shows how attuned she was to the cultural context of the problems she faced in the school community. She pointed out the broader culture of violence and individualistic values, sharing how concerned and distressed she feels regarding this situation. Why does she feel so? According to her, it is because she cares a lot about her students and her role in their lives, "*We are part of these students' lives, they are part of our lives. I can't [ignore that]!*" And yet she felt unsure and uncertain about what to do or about which interventions could be effective. She said, "*I came here with a strong desire to learn and be helped so that I can help.*" Therefore, since the beginning Maya demonstrated a high degree of reflexivity, articulating her experience with broader issues.

In the second session, she resonated with the sentiment of some participants, as she, too, thought of herself as alone in her worries. However, by listening to others speak of the demands imposed on them by the administration, as well as social expectations (like "*keeping the class under control*"), Maya said she shared those ideas. She noted how refreshing it was to hear them, because at the end of the day "*the school with its gates, discipline, even in the* ***language*** *(...) is very violent. It's violent towards us [teachers] when we enter the school environment (...) and towards the students.*"

Following that interaction she said, "*We raised a very interesting issue, which I thought to affect just myself (laughs). Sometimes we get worried and feel insecure about certain matters, but then we realize that it's not just our concern, you know....*" That is, she realized she was not alone with her doubts and worries. Then Maya said that when she tried to speak her mind to other colleagues and share some of her concerns, they told her she should have more control over students, and that was it. This feedback implied that her worries were best left unspoken, as "good teachers" do not voice questions about their own practice, they simply act with authority. She expressed apprehension about being perceived as a weak teacher if she shared her concerns with her colleagues again.

However, closing the session, she said "*I'm leaving the meeting today with the feeling that the questions I ask are not unique to myself. That sometimes (...) people have difficulty expressing doubts because it seems that when you start questioning (...) what you are doing (...) it gives the impression that you don't know what you're doing. And it's important for us to see that there are still people who question.*" Here we begin to notice a shift in the idea of "questioning makes me a weak/worse teacher," therefore validating her inquiries and curiosity because she listened to other people asking questions too.

Continuing with the session, when we addressed the topic of the teachers' role, Maya said "*There is a preconceived idea (...) that you (...) are the one who will teach, who will facilitate learning (...) but in specific moments of our professional lives, we need to reconsider the actual role and competence of the teacher. (...) Sometimes it feels like we must be the Wonder Woman or the Superman when we're there, in front of the classroom, but we are human beings, we will make mistakes (...)*." She continued showing openness to reflect upon this subject, as well as to self-reflect and question teachers' assumptions (hers, other teachers, and the generalized others). Then a perhaps new perspective emerged: "*I believe we need to give ourselves the right to understand that we are not [committed to] a fixed role, the one saying, 'the teacher has to do this!' (pause for emphasis). But in each moment, in each class we enter, it's a reality, it's a different moment of you with yourself and with those people who are there.*"

The way she spoke about her students and the experiences she had as a student demonstrate how attuned she is to them, revealing a remarkable level of empathy towards the students. She declared that she sometimes relates more to them than to other teachers. It is precisely this empathy that is connected to her sense of worry and desperation – her desire to find the "correct" way to intervene in conflict situations. This operates as a powerful motivator for her continued engagement with students. She consistently demonstrates

sensitivity by acknowledging and appreciating each student as an individual, showing flexibility in her approach so that it can accommodate the unique characteristics of each person or group she interacts with.

However, Maya claimed her biggest challenge was engaging in dialogue with students.

> *The biggest challenge I face is the difficulty of having a dialogue with them (laughs), to have my students speak up. I was talking to them (...) on the first day of class, an evening class. I always propose to introduce myself, share who I am, where I live, where I was born (...), you know, I try to create a connection, (...) because we spent so much time online, wearing masks, not seeing people's faces… [I wanted them to have a sense of] at least (...) who would be with us this year. And I let them feel free to speak [about themselves]. There was a boy who said, "Why is that necessary?" (...) When he said that (pause), I replied, "Oh, it's for us to get to know each other better (...) But if you don't want to speak, it's okay! Don't feel obligated." But, at the same time he brought that up, I felt really bad, you know, like I was forcing something onto them. I said, "No, you don't have to speak," but it was a moment to relax, to build a relationship, and sometimes they don't even want to participate at that moment. Not even a "Hi, how are you?" or a "good morning, good afternoon" (...) sometimes it's just silence, and you start to think, wow… (...) even this smallest form of dialogue is difficult. It scares me a little, you know? (...) If we can't even exchange greetings, [how will we] have a deeper exchange during the class?*
>
> *I feel quite distressed when you can't reach them, and then you keep talking and talking with them, trying to... sometimes it gives the impression, like, "Man, you're so annoying, you keep insisting," right?*

No doubt students have developed preconceived notions about the role of teachers and education in their lives, which originates from conventional hierarchical educational systems. In these systems, there is a very limited receptiveness or curiosity towards who the students are as individuals, their personal learning aspirations, or their desires, among other facets of their lives. Moreover, the curriculum is what dictates what they should learn, no matter who they are or come from. Hence, their resistance to speak their minds, even if just to respond to a "How are you?". Maya's experience shows that it is not enough to insist that they speak, because, in contexts already dominated by a vertical hierarchy, a simple exchange of ideas seems pointless to students. She could exhaust herself telling them she cared about what they

thought and felt, but if that discourse is not backed up by actions or welcoming nonverbal communication, the efforts would be in vain.

An interesting twist happened in the following session when Maya shared something she had tried with one of her classes. According to her, this class was a particularly difficult one, and she had had many problems with students regarding bad behavior and lack of focus. She noticed they always came to class after a brief break – a twenty-minute lunch break between classes – and were operating on a demanding, rigid timetable. Considering this context, she said she had tried something new.

> *[Before the class started] I said, "Let's stop for a moment, let's breathe, how are you all feeling?" So they could relax a bit (...) And so [after a few weeks of this], our relationship changed, because* that was a very *agitated class.*
> *That moment, there, made a difference in the first year of High School (...) 32 students in the classroom, after they had a rushed lunch, taking that pause, then, we take that time, have a little chat, ask them how they're doing and such.* ***Not that I didn't do that before*** *(emphasis), but* ***now I do it with more care, from a different perspective,*** *you know? And they have become more relaxed, so it's not time that I'm wasting, on the contrary, it's time I'm gaining, because afterward, they (...) feel like, "Wow, the teacher cares about me, right? She's asking how I'm doing." We pause, take a look, give them a pat on the shoulder, "Hey, are you tired? Splash some water on your face in the bathroom…"*
>
> *Having that attention for them there, I saw that it changed my relationship, you know, I'll miss [our meetings]. Because* ***it's the little details****, right, that we sometimes do in one class or another. (...) there (emphasis) it was specific, I needed that time,* ***and your nudge there was essential, it really helped****, you know?*

Maya managed to break away from the expected vertical rhythm and direction found in traditional education. At face value, what she did with her students can seem overtly simple, barely relevant. However, looking closely at the relational, multifaceted aspects at play in most school classrooms, Maya managed to incorporate subtle gestures and affective disposition to a myriad of actions that *metacommunicated* to students her positive intentions and motivations. She thereby contributed to significant changes in the students' relational patterns with one another and with her.

She introduced a new rhythm, a new relaxing interactional frame (constructive *affective-semiotic atmosphere*, see Discussion), that provided a space that welcomed diversity in dialogue, triggering reflections and conversations, which built trust between her and students. These pauses, or intentional temporary breaks, then played a vital role in establishing a warm and inviting atmosphere, where non-verbal signals encourage open expressions and meaningful conversations.

During the interview, I asked Maya about any changes she thought she might have experienced in her perception and dealing with conflicts after attending our meetings. The answer was,

> *I didn't know when to stop, and that's what I learned here, the moment to pause and address this conflict. To notice, "that's it, it's relevant." So I can understand that I'm not trying to accomplish the impossible (laughs).* ***Understanding that conflict (emphasis) is a part of it, is something important, right?***
>
> *When I make a statement [in class], my tone of voice, I'm always very calm when speaking, but when I make a statement that I already know might cause some discomfort for [a student], (...) I pause to look, you know? And then, in my next statement, I already have another way to avoid a conflict but to engage in dialogue.*
> *But* ***this is due to the influence of the meetings****, you know? Because we managed to understand that there is conflict [is a part of it] (...), it helped me a lot in the classroom, this change in my approach, that insight, looking at the student and realizing how much our words can sometimes create discomfort and ruin a class (laughs), or you can do the opposite (...). In my (...) classes, I have had more [tranquility].*
>
> *[the first time] I spoke with you,* ***you must have noticed [how] anxious [I was],*** *and I didn't know if I was the one creating the problem, you know (laughs) (...) and now I know the moment to have a break. Recognizing that* ***we don't have the power to keep things under control all the time****, that we don't control, because they are human beings. There are almost 30, 40 little individuals there, with different thoughts, right? And different cultures, so, situations will happen, and* ***we need to be prepared not to provide all the answers and not to control everything but be prepared for dialogue****. Practicing dialogue. Practicing listening, especially. Because I think what is often lacking, especially for kids and young people, is listening.*
>
> *And that when we need help, we have to ask for it,* ***we have to seek help, because we won't solve all problems alone****, especially in a classroom. Because problems created in a classroom, actually, they are not created (emphasis) within the classroom, they come to the classroom (...) So when the problem comes to us, sometimes it's enormous, and we won't be able to solve it alone, so it's about seeking help, right?*

Maya was able to translate the experience she had within the group into her interactions with students. Her account of incorporating pauses into her teaching is an *indicator* of that. Additionally, a more subtle, yet significant shift is the ease and tranquility she demonstrated during the interview, even when discussing challenging conflicts with students and problems at school, further highlighting her increased ability to handle difficult situations.

What surprised me, though, was how much she accomplished in the end, the strategies she developed with students after the meetings. Initially, we hoped to spot indicators of intention to act, such as an interest in pursuing a master's degree and implementing new strategies in class based on our discussions. We were looking for indicators of change, but we knew that significant changes would be unlikely to be evident after just eight meetings. However, during the interview, Maya reported actual changes in her teaching. She shared specific actions she had taken and carried out after our discussions. However, it is important to acknowledge that this speaks more about Maya herself than solely attributing that only to the meetings. Our meetings, of course, did not directly cause this outcome—this would be untrue and not aligned with our theoretical perspective—but as Maya herself pointed out, the meetings did have an impact on her motivation, reflections, and actions, acting as a kind of catalyst to such changes. The actions she implemented are within our following summary of Maya's process.

To summarize, *in the first sessions*, Maya already demonstrated a reasonable degree of reflexivity, motivation, and curiosity about what we were going to discuss, and she also expressed disquiet angst and uncertainty about how to deal with sensitive topics like race, gender, and diversity. The scenario of violence against women and youth suicide in her school community was the tip of the iceberg that, for her, pointed to something deeper, more elusive, happening in daily interactions within her school.

During the sessions, she

(1) noticed her concerns were shared with participants. She was "not the only one."

(2) heard Vivian, Elsa, Theo, and other participants speak of graduate courses/other courses they were either undertaking or wishing to enroll in.

(3) externalized complex, paradoxical, dichotomic feelings such as discomfort and angst regarding conflicts, as well as said they "might not be so bad," or they "are important." She claimed a conflict might not be so bad when it brings to the surface relevant aspects not seen/heard before, which were outside of the teacher's awareness.

By the end of the meetings, Maya reported thinking and acting in new ways to bring students and fellow teachers to cultivate reflexivity. These actions were:

(1) To develop a project with "difficult classes" called "reflection hour."

(2) To invite/host outside experts to talk about violence against women in the school context.

(3) To construct a supportive network for teachers, so they can talk and discuss with colleagues about challenges and possibilities in their classes.

(4) To engage in continued education: Maya completed a continued education course on "Socio-emotional skills." She also started working on a master's project proposal in preparation for pursuing a master's degree.

(5) To take small steps to achieve her goals. For instance, she introduced nuanced changes in her classroom that improved the way she related to her students.

Elsa

Elsa is a science teacher who works with Middle School students, had recently graduated with her bachelor's degree, and was relatively new to the teaching profession, being her second year as a teacher. Elsa worked within a school where most students were

white, or light-skinned. She shared that "*Since I was an undergraduate, in my initial training, I was interested in working with anti-racist education in the teaching of sciences. This brought about many conflicts throughout my degree, colleagues' resistance [to the topic*]." Elsa said that the experience of working in public schools in her first few years as a teacher had a significant impact on her, as countless forms of violence permeated these schools and communities. She sees the possibility of working with issues of race in these schools to face this violence and foster a more democratic and inclusive school environment. Due to her interest in working with these issues, she was very motivated to participate in our meetings, because although she always strived to be responsible when she dealt with conflicts and racism, she wondered if she might, unknowingly, offend students with her approach.

Exploring the topic of the students' resistance, Elsa shared that she noticed how uncomfortable her students were with discussions of racial issues, and it made her wonder if she should retreat and not talk about it anymore. However, after some exchanges with participants, she said "*it's very important for me to think about this issue [of the students' resistance], to think about how I can* ***show*** *myself to be open, to listen, to understand. Thinking about the constructions we make about stereotypes, stigmas and I'm thinking about how I can be there open to listen to what they have to say and how we can reflect together [her and her students], without individualizing their points of view, without making the student feel like they're wrong or being judged, you know (...).*" Here we begin to see a shift in her perspective of resistance as a bad sign, a sign to retreat, to resistance as an openness to dialogue.

During the session where we discussed the documentary, "When I feel I know" (showcasing ten school initiatives in Brazil aimed at breaking with traditional methods), Elsa pointed out something that stood out for her. In the documentary, they interview educators, parents, and some students. Elsa was struck by one Middle School student:

> *(...) she commented on the fact that when she arrived [at the new school] she didn't think she was going to learn anything, because of the different dynamics. And she mentions the time it took for her to get used to it and realize that she was actually going to learn [there]. I found that very interesting, because I constantly see [the same with my students] when I try to bring something a bit out of the traditional into the classroom, the class resists, right? And then, as I'm a science teacher, there's this expectation of what a standard [science] lesson is. It's funny that sometimes I want to propose, a different activity, like oral presentation from the students instead of a lecture, or propose that everyone sit in a circle (...) but I've heard comments (laughs) like "Wow, it's like a sociology lesson, teacher" "What kind of science lesson is this, teacher?" Always with giggles, because it's not what they're used to.*
>
> *Especially [with teaching subjects connected] to STEAM this is what is expected: content, exams, content, copying material, and taking exams. And then when we ask them to do research, to make a class presentation and they associate it with the humanities, they find it strange to work like this in a STEAM discipline. So, I notice this a lot, [in] the first few times I tried a different dynamic (...) I noticed a lot of resistance from the class, and this made me worry, like, I felt desperate to know "how am I going to do this different thing if they don't even want it, right?"*
>
> *We think of a different dynamic, we want to do it and we think we're doing something super cool (laughs), and then the class shuts down, thinks it's strange and complains, and thinks it's boring, and then we [teachers] get frustrated, right (laughs).*

It can be observed that the student's resistance to different approaches in class—as activities organized by the teacher, or issues she may raise, such as race/racism—are significant aspects of wobble for Elsa. On the one hand, she reflected on valuing and wanting to implement practices "*a bit out of the traditional*" (as she put it), and, on the other, she still felt insecure and uncertain whether she should persist in this endeavor. It is apparent, though, that the documentary brought new elements for Elsa's reflection. While educator interviews featured in the documentary address the topic of the students' resistance, what stood out for Elsa was the students' testimony. Hearing about the student experience might have highlighted the importance of recognizing that implementing changes and new practices requires time, patience, and trust. This was indicated by Elsa's comment, "*[as the student shows] being used to a traditional standard and suddenly changing it is really challenging. Just as it is for us [teachers], for the students it's also very challenging, right? It's really*

worth to think about the process [the activities to implement]… but being careful, patient with the students, [because] they will also have to go through a process of adaptation."

In subsequent sessions, Elsa shared that one of the things that most discouraged her was the students' lack of enthusiasm for new activities, yet

> *what you all just mentioned, in the sense that at the end of the day, we can't try to get an end result of how the new activity [we planned] will resonate [for the student], because it has to do with the students' individual processes, I think this is very relevant, (...) at the very least it makes us a bit more stimulated to really think about it, (...) thinking about how sometimes we do an activity here, now, and maybe they [students] don't understand it, they might understand it a lot later. (...) I think that's a great [big] truth when we think about our own experience, (...) how many of us have heard from our own family "oh, you won't understand this [experience] now, you'll understand that later" and it often bodes truth.* ***So, it's no different with our school beliefs and consequently with our students****, so I think... it warms the heart a little [to see it in this way].*

We can observe that Elsa slowly shifted her understanding of the students' lack of enthusiasm and/or resistance to her pedagogical practice, to embrace the realization that the impact (significance, learning) of new educational activities on students may unfold over time. Where she said it "*has to do with the students' individual processes,"* we read that it has to do with processes of human development, which no teacher can ultimately control. This lack of control can, of course, be a source of distress and uncertainty, but, at the same time, as Elsa's comment points out, it can bring avenues of patience and openness that "*warms* [her] *heart,"* as she understands what a compassionate and long-term view of student development can offer the teacher.

During the interviews, Elsa shared that, "*because of the exchanges we had during our meetings, I started to think of different ways of collaborating with the student to reflect on the issues we discussed in class. (...) in the context I'm in, I try to work with issues of discrimination, as they emerge a lot, including among the students. And sometimes their reaction is rigid or passionate, as a way of countering what we are working on in class. So, the way I manage to reach these students is not by shaming or imposing, but by inviting them*

to ask themselves questions and reflect on what they're saying, so that they can identify where it comes from, right? So, I began to realize that my dialogue in this sense has been changing."

Elsa highlighted that her efforts now, in the face of her students' resistance, were more directed at "*trying to understand more about their perspective, so that this could be included in the conversation.*" This shows openness on her part and apparent increased ease in dealing with resistance and conflict situations that may arise with her students.

In summary, *at the beginning* Elsa was somewhat discouraged by the resistance of her students, puzzled by how, or even if, she should approach the topic of race in her classroom. Their resistance made Elsa uncertain as to whether she was doing the right thing, even though she strongly valued the inclusion of racial issues in schools. As we discussed these issues *during our meetings*, we noticed that Elsa started to contemplate the idea that resistance to a new perspective or topic in class need not be "solved" but rather could be an opportunity for further engagement. This shift moved her from finding immediate solutions to embracing the process of open dialogues and reflections.

By the end of the meetings, Elsa began to imagine ways to collaborate with her students, by affording them more moments for open reflection, with the simple gesture of promoting inquiries and reflections more often than searching for ready, immediate answers. In other words, she implemented nuanced changes in her classroom dynamics, subtly shifting the way she interacted with her students, that is, engaging in ontological dialogues with them. She also informed me during the interview that she had signed up for a graduate program to obtain her master's degree. Additionally, she expressed that our discussions had motivated her to define and write her research objectives for this academic pursuit.

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, we will present the outcomes and contributions of this research. We first address the successful aspects of the research that enabled us to have such a rich set of data construction. Although conducting research during the COVID-19 pandemic had its challenges, the adaptation to an online forum brought its own set of advantages. Participants did not need to commute, which expanded the diversity of participants coming from various states of Brazil with a wider range of backgrounds and experiences in teaching. Furthermore, the online format provided us with access to a variety of tools that enhanced engagement and facilitated more dynamic conversations among participants.

While in-person research undoubtedly offers its own set of advantages and resources, our online approach still enabled us to create a favorable metacommunicative context leading to a good level of participants' engagement and relevant narratives about their difficulties and experiences. The structure and setup of our meetings played a crucial role in this active engagement. We placed a strong emphasis on allowing the participants' insights and contributions to inform the research's direction—from the empirical investigation to the process of analysis. The meetings were guided by dialogical principles and practices to foster dialogic interactions. Therefore, dialogism, or the dialogical paradigm, not only informed our theoretical framework, our epistemology but also our methodological choices.

Throughout the research process, especially during the recruitment phase and the initial focus group session, we tried to grasp what drove participants to join the group. At the beginning of each meeting, we welcomed the participants by asking how they felt that day and engaged in brief small talk to set an inviting tone for the session. We reminded them to care for their comfort, suggesting that they grab water and/or coffee, and make any necessary adjustments to their surroundings so they could be at ease—letting them know they could

count on our support if necessary. These small, yet consistent gestures contributed to creating a welcoming environment, facilitating an openness that would lead us to a deeper understanding of the participants' meaning-making systems.

The individual interviews allowed us to go one step further in the analysis of adult development, as they offered insights into the participants' experiences, reflections, and activities over the subsequent four months after the group meetings. They were an opportunity to refine our understanding and preliminary interpretations of the data, enabling us to have a clearer idea of how they evaluated the group meetings and the time we spent together. This, in turn, shed light on their meaning-making processes and ecosystems of meaning.

The first section of the chapter is organized to elucidate the dialogical epistemological stance that guided our data construction and analysis. Then, we highlight those crucial theoretical concepts used in the analysis of empirical findings and theoretical elaboration on relevant aspects of teachers' development. Alongside this theoretical exploration, we discuss the practical implications stemming from the present research. The theoretical constructs elaborated in our analysis are *shifts* in *perspectives* and *positionings*, as well as the concept of *Affective Semiotic Atmosphere* - ASA.

1. Dialogism as the research epistemological framework

The epistemological framework that underlies any scientific research consists of the very first step in knowledge construction Given the methodological cycle outlined by Valsiner and Branco (2023), it is relevant to go back to the assumptions made at the beginning of this investigation. By revisiting them, I recall the initial questions that sparked my curiosity: what resources do teachers have to deal with conflicts in schools? How can they be developed? Of particular interest to me were conflicts related to issues of prejudice.

That led us to consider that uncertainty and wobbles are an inherent part of their difficulties in handling conflicts. When faced with a conflict, teachers may undergo what Fecho et al. (2020) termed as “wobbles,” or moments when the next step to face a situation is not immediately apparent to the person. To wobble is to oscillate, be confronted with uncertainty, to encounter the unknown.

Therefore, our investigation narrowed its focus to the day-to-day challenges that teachers face, focusing on the microgenetic moments that sparked uncertainty. That is, how prepared or not they felt to deal with those uncertainties, according to their narrated experience. Marková, Linell and Gillespie (2007) and Wagoner and Kadianaki (2007) argued that we cannot lose sight of the fact that significant micro-interactions always occur in the broader dialogical context of social institutions, social relations, and culture, and should be investigated since they play a relevant part in the world’s social structures and dynamics (and vice-versa). So, how do macro- and micro-dimensions weave together? This is what we explore in the following section.

1.1 The Dialogic paradigm within schools: obstacles and horizons

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the participants and the researcher navigated their communication and metacommunication between micro- and macro-dimensions throughout the meetings. They discussed examples of their day-to-day interactions with students, as well as revealed intricacies and worries about multiple aspects of the macrosocial context within which they were situated. In all examples, we could discern the influence of macro-cultural structures and dynamics. For instance, Maya expressed her frustration at not knowing how to intervene when a student vehemently criticized feminists and feminism, and Nicole encountered obstacles while attempting to conduct an activity about race in her class.

In the latter case, she faced reprimands such as "*It could be seen as an offense within the community*" and "*Why even talk about race in the school?*".

These examples are situations discussed by the teachers and could be easily dismissed as too specific, yet they are imbued with layers of meso- and macro-structures and cultural practices, which effectively shape the way things operate or are expected to operate. Therefore, when we wonder how the dialogic paradigm can be effectively implemented in schools, or what it means to be a dialogical teacher, we need to consider these *multiple layers in (inter)action*. Often, the focus is too narrowly placed on either the individual (micro) or the social-systemic (macro) aspects. Our goal, however, is to move beyond this binary approach and explore the dynamic relations between these layers and dimensions to better understand human development processes and the contexts in which development takes place.

Cultural canalization in schools is traditionally characterized by dominance, rigid hierarchies, and authoritarianism. The pervasive cultural forces that favor traditional, unidirectional content transmission methods that overly focus on instruction and cognition pose significant barriers to implementing different practices, such as dialogical approaches. However, cultural canalization *is not* a deterministic concept. Despite strong cultural forces that may lead us towards specific paths, *agency* and the *constructive nature of subjects* play a crucial role in the mutual coconstruction between individuals and culture. It is important to acknowledge that, on the one hand, macro-forces (structures, systems, institutions, processes) exert the canalization of one's actions; but, on the other, individuals play a significant role in the *specific creative and unpredictable ways that they internalize cultural meanings and externalize their own cocreation* (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015).

An interesting aspect that emerged in the data analysis was that the specific examples participants shared about their everyday challenges with students always seemed to connect to aspects *beyond* the scope of teacher-student interactions. While this might seem self-

evident, we highlight it to recognize how often the impact of macro-structures on our micro-level interactions and lived experiences is overlooked or not thoroughly considered.

For example, in Episode 1 Olivia pointed to the lack of administrative support when handling conflicts with students. She described a scenario where a teacher, unknowingly recorded by a student during class, was subsequently punished with a temporary leave following the incident's escalation. Olivia shared this case to voice her fear of being in the same situation as this teacher, saying that a conflict with one student might extend far beyond their interpersonal issues.

Nicole, in Episode 2, discussed her experience of planning a class focused on racial awareness, only to face criticism from both her colleagues and the administration. They argued that discussing controversial subjects with students was unnecessary, or even offensive to the students. The activity ended up being canceled at the time. We can conclude that these teachers' moments of wobble stemmed not only from the complexities of teacher-student relationships and the difficulties of navigating conflicts between them. They also (mainly) stemmed from the shock, frustration, and surprise of feeling threatened and unsupported by their colleagues, school administration, and the social environment in which they work and live.

An even more emblematic example of their difficulties appears in Episode 3, where participants were asked to share their thoughts on the documentary excerpt that portrayed a conflict between Middle School students that was mediated by a third party, another student. Teachers argued that the students were able to reach that understanding of one another precisely because it was a student who acted as the agent of that mediation; adults, they pondered, were not very helpful in that regard.

This scene sparked a conversation between the teachers about the challenges they encountered when attempting to diversify pedagogical practices in the classroom, meaning,

trying to actively engage students in dialogical practices. They were captivated by the students' capacity to manage the conflict on their own, thanks in part to the institutional support provided by the school, which created an environment that made it possible. The participants, however, lamented that their efforts to apply something like the school in the documentary in their respective workplaces, citing that it usually led to recurrent frustrations due to the lack of support from the institution.

Amanda shared her and her colleagues' experiences of attempting to introduce innovative ideas only to have them consistently rejected. Theo, Eric, and Vivian echoed this sentiment, each relating variations of this rebuff: *"No. That won't work, forget it."*; *"You're wasting your time, you have to get to the classroom, give your ABCs, and leave already. You don't have to do anything beyond that."*; *"Oh, you're meeting with this group of teachers? [Or you're doing another continued training?] For what? That's nonsense. Just go teach your class and that's it,"*

Such recurring messages, hence, represent a collective sentiment/voice that stands in opposition to new practices in schools. Remarkably, this resistance/pushback is not merely against the actual implementation of new ideas, but it also extends even to their initial consideration. In their perception, there was little or no openness whenever they suggested something new.

Therefore, these can be considered generalized (hypergeneralized) messages from school administrations and other educators. As Aveling et al. (2015) argue, the "self is always infused with and responding to the voices of Others. (…) the Self often thinks and speaks with the words of Others" (p. 671). The internalized voices of the collective culture (Valsiner, 2014)—characterized by rigid hierarchies and authoritarianism—exert powerful constraints. The *personal and social expectations* about a teacher's pedagogical practices do affect their actions (present and future) and positionings (Branco et al., 2020). In the participants' case,

they constrain the possibilities to put new ideas into practice. As Amanda states, *"And what happens? Nothing. (...) We don't [even] know if it's going to work. (...) we don't try anything new. No new projects are attempted, and (...) we carry on with education like this."*

These generalized messages, therefore, feed into the strong collective/social force to maintain the status quo. When teachers are told to "*forget about it," "don't bother,"* etc., it is implied that they should do their jobs as they are told, not ask many questions, or make too much effort to change anything. Typically, in a traditional classroom setting, questions are presented with predefined answers, and teachers are expected to strictly follow a script, as deviations may provoke concerns and uncertainties (Archangelo, 2005). In a society that values compliance over autonomy, educators learn to feel threatened and worried if someone dares to guide the class in a different direction, like a student who deviates from the established class plan by asking a question or saying something problematic. Kennedy (2005) suggests that one of the reasons teachers may be concerned or feel threatened by class deviation is due to the various schedule constraints imposed by the administration and school bureaucracy. As a result of these multiple tensions, efficiency in *transmitting* knowledge is prioritized in their work, rather than the pursuit of other *educational goals*, such as human development.

The prevailing belief is that a quiet and controlled classroom leads to higher academic achievement. Breaking away from this longstanding belief and embracing a more dialogical approach is challenging. This idea is so deeply ingrained in our collective culture (or the collective culture of these educators) that a silent class is considered ideal, and moving through discussions, wobbles, and uncertainties (i.e., a "mess") typical of a dialogic class can be daunting, to say the least. In one session, Maya explained that *"teachers sometimes avoid talking about [sensitive issues], avoid bringing up discussions to avoid conflict. To guarantee [that conflict] won't happen. [But what if] we need to make it happen, so it will lead us to an*

important debate, right? What if this is the only way some issues will come to the surface? But we keep silent because of these [pressures and expectations], and it's painful."

We can see that Maya wobbles between avoiding vs recognizing the importance of conflict to bring issues to the surface, to have open discussions that might not otherwise occur, discussions that could help her (and other teachers) to learn about students' problems, interests, and difficulties. Without this openness to dialogue with students, they may resist classroom activities, routines, and students' progress can be hindered (Chaudhary et al., 2017).

In sum, participants revealed the constraining power of collectively cultivated cultural beliefs over their pedagogical practice. According to them, many of the obstacles they faced in implementing dialogical practices stemmed from the intricate web of institutional and societal dynamics within the educational system, not from their individual challenges or shortcomings. Macro- and meso-dimensions such as curricular demands, strict schedules, and expectations concerning a teacher's role, all affect their daily decision-making and pedagogical approaches. After all, teachers find themselves overwhelmed with questions regarding the most appropriate course of action, the potential institutional consequences, and the possible effects on their relationships with students in the short and long terms, as participants shared.

Although such problems do not appear to have immediate solutions and result in contradictions between teachers' intentions and their actual practices, engaging in discussions about dialogical practices points to a horizon of hope. A pedagogical environment where new perspectives for action are open, from teachers' search for preparation and engagement with new practices to collectively pursue changes in the school context.

For example, Naomi shared her persistence in the face of institutional skepticism. When she proposed an intervention project to assist a student with learning difficulties, she

initially faced resistance from the administration, like most of her colleagues in the group. Still, she requested permission to take a small step forward, which was finally granted. The positive impact of her initiative on the student's learning was significant to her, serving as a powerful source of motivation. Naomi said, "*For me, that's a boost, you know? And being here [in the group] also helps us a lot, reinvigorates our energy, because it's not easy to keep hearing complaints and pushback all the time. It's not easy to just do nothing."*

Horizons of possibilities, therefore, emerged from the collective meaning-making processes during the interactions among the participants. Importantly, this emergence should not be interpreted as directly leading to change, as though teachers would seamlessly implement dialogical practices within their classrooms. Rather, our observation points to identifying indicators of *openness to the possible* (Glaveanu, 2023) that surfaced among participants, akin to the examples of Theo and Naomi in Episode 3. Such openness is crucial, as it could bring them out of the overwhelming uncertainty towards a greater engagement with what could be achieved – possibilities.

To analyze and better understand the processes involved with the teachers' (possible) progressive openness during our research experience, we introduced the notion of "shifts." The concept of shifts applied to the analysis of the teachers' *perspectives* and *positionings* emerged as a relevant tool to make sense of their potential development. Thus, we clarify next our definitions of *shifts*, *perspectives,* and *positionings*.

2. *Shifts* as micro-processes of change: a fruitful developmental construct

The concept of shift(s) proved valuable during the process of data analysis, as it became apparent that, within group interactions, the teachers expressed some changes in their perspectives and positionings as they engaged in questioning, contrasting, (re)constructing, and (co-)constructing new meanings. For now, we define *perspectives as general standpoints*

inferred from what participants said, their points of view or opinions. A brief definition of *positionings* refers to *who,* what subjective voice, is uttering the specific statements. That is, from what vantage point, background, or individual unique history specific opinions, utterances, feelings, and perspectives are presented. Both concepts—perspective and positioning—will be further explored later, but, first, we need to provide an explanation of what we mean when referring to *shifts*, starting with an example.

In Episode 2, Olivia said, "*Teachers in public schools have more freedom than private school teachers,*" referring to her perspective on a controversial topic about school education. For her, she was more restricted in her work in a private school than her public-school colleagues. This perspective, though, was challenged by Elsa when she disputed this view, by saying that this was a "supposed freedom," as public school teachers were threatened by government officials and congresspeople.

Both Olivia and Elsa appeared quite confident in their respective perspectives, indicating a strong (affective) attachment to their beliefs. However, during their interaction, something remarkable occurred—these seemingly firm and different perspectives started to become more permeable as they dialogued with each other and the group. As noted in the analysis of Episode 2, Olivia later acknowledged that she had not previously thought about that perspective brought by Elsa, but she was doing so after their exchange of ideas. She not only expressed that in words, but she also conveyed a sense of awe and surprise in response to what she had learned.

This is one of the examples where we observed a subtle movement of change taking place, and this change was inferred by verbal and nonverbal *indicators provided by the person from that moment onward*. These subtle movements of change did not necessarily imply a radical transformation, nor an expressive rupture of the participant's perspectives (Valsiner, 2021), instead they consisted of something more nuanced that emerged in the

specific interactions, when the new information and perspective *made affective-semiotic sense* for the person (Olivia, in this example). We refer to such specific changes as *shifts*, i.e., instances of a subtle change that provided evidence of the unfolding of *possible* significant changes (development). To gain a deeper understanding of what we mean, a microgenetic analysis proves to be a fruitful approach.

Microgenetic analysis highlights the value of examining interactions at a granular level, as it affords a unique opportunity to identify subtle details that might otherwise go unnoticed (Branco, 2014; Lavelli et al., 2005). It constitutes a qualitative exploration of nuances, or small differences, which are present in brief pauses, emphasis in the discourse, verbal/nonverbal signals, and (subtle) changes that occur in people's interactions. In the context of this research, interactions occurred in real-time, distinguishing them from classical dialogical analysis of discourse or literature (Bakhtin, 1997; Matusov, 2009).

Zittoun and Gillespie (2020) proposed that "each turn in the dialogue does not leave behind the prior turns; all turns, all meanings evoked become accumulated into the common ground of the participants, ready to contribute to the meaning of what is said or to be pulled as resources into a new turn" (p. 834). This type of exchange is an expansive, complex, and dynamic one, where meanings are not given, but are continually constructed and reconstructed as the dialogue unfolds. Analyzing interactions as they happen provides a unique opportunity to identify the *emergence* and *development* of a phenomenon, including processes of meaning-making and, therefore, possible *shifts* in perspectives and positionings. Such shifts may contribute to more enduring developmental changes along life trajectories, even though, due to the complex dynamics of affective-semiotic processes, this might not occur. In any case, shifts can be considered a significant indicator of openness for the transformation of perspectives and/or personal positionings (as explained later), as well as the emergence of possible changes (Glaveanu, 2023) concerning the person's values.

Next, our focus centers on shifts related to personal *perspectives* and *positionings*.

2.1. Discussing *perspectives*

During data analysis, a central question emerged: What makes someone open to considering new perspectives or perspectives different than their own? What can happen during social interactions for someone to *actually* listen to and, eventually, consider the possibility of assuming a different perspective on a well-established set of beliefs sustaining one's previous perspective? Before someone changes their mind concerning deep-rooted issues, a specific distinctive process operates because instantaneous moves from one perspective to another rarely take place. Some sense of stability regarding who we are and what we believe acts as a buffer against abrupt changes (Grossen & Orvig, 2011). Therefore, we argue that before a qualitative leap of change can be observed in people's perspectives, some specific processes, possibly subtle ones, initially take place, leading the person to consider or become open to new points of view. The point, then, is what may facilitate people in changing their minds?

Episode 2, already discussed, illustrates the way perspectives can move within a social interaction. As new perspectives emerged during the interaction, the very topic under discussion also changed. What began as a discussion on talking to students about race, sparked by Nicole, shifted to talking to students about controversial topics in schools, both private and public. The noteworthy moment was when Olivia realized that public school teachers also were threatened by external pressures to avoid discussing sensitive topics.

In fact, during Episode 2 I had concerns about tensions escalating between participants. I feared that comparing private *vs* public schools would become polarized, risking a divide within the group that could halt the flow of the conversation. However, the participants' facial expressions and tones of voice, notably Olivia's and Elsa's, who voiced

contrasting perspectives, signaled their willingness to understand each other's perspectives. Instead of adopting a tone of preaching, or a rigid binary of right *vs* wrong, they expressed their concerns while acknowledging each other's perspectives. This indicated a productive exchange rather than a confrontational one, where barriers were permeable, not rigid.

Similarly, in Episode 3 we observed a tension between the participant's perspectives. Theo, Vivian, and Naomi represented voices of hope and motivation that questioned and mobilized Amanda's sense of defeat concerning the teacher's difficulties in overcoming their frustrations. The discussion was not linear and was somewhat turbulent, as participants revisited certain topics and new angles were introduced, such as Eric's line of questioning. The analysis of this episode shows the possibility of people holding multiple perspectives and feelings associated with deeply rooted beliefs, within a dialogic, welcoming context.

They elaborated on feelings of frustration, despair, anger, and puzzlement regarding the permanent discouragement messages and rules enforced or suggested by school administrators and fellow teachers. They questioned why proposing different practices or approaches to dealing with students or teaching was considered so undesirable or inappropriate, entailing such resistance by their colleagues and administrators. Yet, amidst their frustrations, the emergence of glimpses of motivation surfaced, pointing out possible shifts in Amanda's perspective, as well as Eric's and Vivian's. In session 6, Amanda sounded energized when presenting the strategies she imagined to successfully manage sensitive situations in school – the activity proposed. This surprised us, as she typically approached the topic of strategies with a discouraged tone. It might be possible that the exercise of listing the pros and cons of the strategies provided her with the opportunity to confront her frustrations in a new light, not dismissing them, and allowed her to wonder what else might be beyond them. As Glaveanu (2020c) points out "wonder stands out for its capacity to engage us with the possible" (p. 183).

To observe and examine interactions is to deal with divergence of perspectives "combined with varying degrees of awareness of that divergence" (Gillespie, 2007, p. 125). Seen through this micro-lens, perspectives can move rapidly as they emerge, dissipate, or strengthen, and we often lose sight of the intricate processes supporting these changes. However, within the contexts that are receptive to these movements, to the expression of doubts and uncertainties, where multiple perspectives are welcome and free to converge or clash with one another, *openness to new perspectives can thrive and grow within the group*. That is, the more people feel comfortable while expressing themselves to each other, the more inclined they are to do so. This special kind of environment is here conceptualized as a *constructive metacommunicative frame,* a concept—*Affective-Semiotic Atmosphere*—that will be discussed later.

Shifts in perspectives were, then, observed during the meetings from a microgenetic analysis. They consisted of subtle changes that pointed towards the participants' willingness or openness to be affected by one another. Indicators were found in statements such as "*Regarding what Eric just said, right, I was here trying to think of an image [a metaphor to represent the discussion]…"; "All the other reflections that Theo and Amanda brought up [now] also ended up having an impact on my thinking, because...."*. These statements reveal expressions of hearing one another and potentially letting others' perspectives impact their line of thought, observed in their next contribution to the discussion, at least at that moment. As specific interactions unfolded, strong indicators emerged that many participants actively listened to the others' perspectives, because their statements were significantly connected, and dialogically flowed in responsive turns to each other.

As Bakhtin argued (1997), all utterances have addressivity, that is, they reply to previous utterances, and anticipations of future ones. Accordingly, tracking these movements at a microgenetic level enables us to grasp the shifts within fields of meaning (Gillespie &

Zittoun, 2013). The present research, by adopting a microgenetic analysis of interactions, makes a valuable contribution in this regard. However, it is also important to clarify that engaging with multiple perspectives and being affected, at a certain moment, by others' perspectives does not ensure that these new perspectives will endure and impact the person's future actions, nor that they will be internalized sufficiently to effectuate a more permanent change.

Therefore, investigations of indicators of whether and how participants internalized different meanings and perspectives after discussing and reflecting on specific topics, will always require a deeper approach and follow-up analysis. The individual interviews aimed to do so, but we are aware that this cannot be enough to confirm the occurrence of long-lasting changes (human development). In other words, follow-up interviews and direct observations were needed to provide stronger evidence concerning effective developmental changes in teachers' work practices. By presenting the (vertical) case study analysis of two participants, we illustrate how it is possible to track and observe potential shifts that may have occurred in the teachers' perspectives and positionings throughout the study period.

2.2 Analyzing *positionings*: internalization and externalization processes

The notion of *positioning* adopted here acknowledges the use of the construct by Harré and colleagues (Harré, 2012; van Langenhove & Harré, 1999) in the context of what they denominated as "positioning theory." Positioning theory, according to Moghaddam and Harré (2010) is an effort to make sense of "how people use words (and discourse of all types) to locate themselves and others" (p. 2). However, from our Cultural Semiotic Psychology theoretical perspective, *positioning* is a much more inclusive psychological concept, stemming from both Dialogical Self-Theory (Hermans, 2018; Hermans & Gieser, 2011; Monereo & Hermans, 2023) and Cultural Psychology (Branco et al., 2020; Obando &

Branco, 2023). From this perspective, *positionings are particularly rooted in affectivity*, discourse being just one aspect of the construct, and inferences regarding the individual's positioning come both from verbal and nonverbal observable actions and clues.

Although analyzing the dynamics of self-positionings of participants (or mapping the development of their Dialogical Self System) is not an aim of this research, we recognize the value of *positioning* as a concept that helps us understand how people see, feel, and locate themselves concerning different issues within social communicative contexts. When talking about *shifts*, not only do we engage with individuals' perspectives, but we also acknowledge that something psychologically deeper underlies the emergence of their perspectives—that is, the perspective comes from somewhere, *is voiced by someone*. This something would be the person's positioning in reference to some issue, from which they interpret the world and themselves. As we elaborated in the theoretical foundations of the present research, when such positionings eventually become too deeply rooted in affectivity within the system, they may give rise to values that sustain specific Dynamic Self Positionings within the self-system, becoming more dominant over others in the hierarchy. Nevertheless, most positionings do not acquire such psychological significance, and many can be considered temporary or circumstance-related, not achieving such status.

In making this distinction, we also began to ponder the differentiation (if any) between perspectives and positionings. It is observed that often these terms are utilized as synonymous and referred to interchangeably (Fecho et al., 2020; Gillespie, 2006; Gillespie & Cornish, 2014; Glaveanu, 2018; van der Veen et al., 2018; Xing et al., 2024; Zittoun, 2014). For the purposes of the present discussion, we believe that specifying the definition of both concepts is important. We do recognize the interdependence and proximity of concepts such as "perspective" and "positioning"—as well as the intricate way in which they are entwined. Therefore, our goal is not to separate complex ideas into rigid categories. Instead, we aim to

deepen our understanding of the psychological dynamics involved in meaning-making processes that may, eventually, lead to the development of specific values and worldviews. The effort to define each concept is, hence, not about simplifying them into easily recognizable categories but is about enriching our comprehension through the theoretical and semiotic resources currently available to us.

In the context of the Dialogical Self Theory, I-position/positioning are defined by Monereo & Hermans (2023) as

> (…) a spatial act, positioning is placing oneself vis-à-vis with somebody else and, at the same time, towards oneself in the metaphorical space of the self. As a spatial-relational process, I-p [I-positioning] represents a stance towards somebody, either physically or virtually, and addresses the other or oneself via verbal or non-verbal orientations and communications. (p. 3)

The concept of positioning is flexible, as it encompasses both active and passive dimensions. That is, it is not just about how I position myself in relation to others or myself, such as self-critique, but it is also how I am positioned by others, for instance, being perceived by students as a rigid or distant teacher (Monereo & Hermans, 2023). The labels and roles ascribed to me by others—"good girl/bad girl," "nice employee/rude employee," or "good teacher/demanding teacher"—have an impact on my self-perception and my interactions with others. They play a role in what Hermans (2001) describes as the organization of the self. However, this process is not deterministic. The way I am positioned by others does not definitively dictate which voices I constructively internalize, or which positionings will emerge within my dialogical self-system.

Hence, a dialogical teacher, or a teacher who values dialogical practices and wants to put them into action, encounters a significant challenge: adopting a dialogical stance in the context of traditional, authoritarian educational and societal institutions. Drawing from

Hermans' theoretical framework, teachers might find themselves positioned by the administration and by parents as authoritarian figures rather than facilitators of a dialogical engagement with students. Even though teachers can do their best to be dialogical, this is not solely under their control. The tension between striving for a dialogical relation and being often perceived or positioned by the school administration and/or parents as a permissive teacher is not easy to navigate, as referenced in an earlier section of this chapter.

Elsa, for instance, had a personal dilemma regarding being a science teacher who faced resistance whenever she attempted to address sensitive issues in her class or tried to engage students in dialogic conversation. At first, Elsa thought she was helpless regarding her students' resistance, unsure if it was even possible to overcome it. As we discussed these issues in the group, Elsa slowly shifted her understanding of students' lack of engagement or resistance and realized the impact new educational activities on students may reveal over time. She said, "*at the end of the day we [teachers] can't try to get an end result of how the new activity will reverberate [for the student], because it has to do with the student's individual processes."*

When she says that ("*has to do with the student's individual processes*"), she is talking about processes of human development, which take time and no teacher can ultimately control. This lack of control, of course, can be a source of distress and uncertainty, but realizing that made Elsa feel better ("*warms* the *heart*"), as she understood that student development takes time, realizing she was not unsuccessful but is a competent teacher. Here a shift in her positioning as a teacher was identified.

According to Valsiner (2021) "I-ME system is resistant to transformation" (p. 153). Innovation within the system is a dance of stability and change, a dynamic interplay between forces of friction and tension. A principle within Cultural Psychology that helps us understand the active role of the person in their meaning-making and in transforming their

own self through their life is the notion of the simultaneous operation of agency and internalization/externalization processes (Branco et al., 2004; Obando & Branco, 2023; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015). As Branco et al. (2004) affirm,

> The distinction between internal and external domains is necessary because it consists of a crucial theoretical and analytical tool in order to make sense of the emergence of developmental processes. That is, the dialectical tension between the poles internal and external has a heuristic value in helping to explain the sprouting of changes and novelties. (p. 14-15).

Regarding our investigation's endeavor, we looked for indicators of possible emerging shifts and novelties that participants expressed regarding their positionings. To that effect, internalization/externalization processes contribute to our analysis. Valsiner (2014) delineates three semi-permeable layers within the internalization/externalization processes, which articulate the individual's sensitivity to cultural messages. These messages have the potential of being internalized, integrating the person's self-system. When a message, belief, or value is actively incorporated by the person, we say it has been internalized, and it can be uniquely (actively) externalized back into the culture. As researchers, our access is limited to the individuals' externalizations, through the messages they communicate/metacommunicate, and the actions we observe. These messages and actions indicate possible internalizations, but researchers are always constrained by their informed interpretation effort, certainty is impossible.

The tensions between internalization and externalization processes, hence, serve as a theoretical framework to help us understand the emergence of shifts in Maya's and Elsa's case. The vertical analysis—including the follow-up individual interview—with both participants revealed instances of shifts in positionings. They were two participants who, initially, experienced uncertainties and concerns about their interactions with their students,

such as fear of escalating conflict and lack of confidence about the "correct" interventions. However, as the group process unfolded, they seemed to slowly achieve a state of tranquility and ease.

We identified this sense of tranquility as they progressively externalized their understanding concerning their respective dilemmas and issues with students over time. Both gave examples of how they changed their way of dealing with conflicts. Elaborating further on Elsa's case, she was discouraged by a student's resistance to discussing the topics of race in her science class. However, as the meetings progressed, Elsa started to contemplate the idea that resistance might be an important part of the process. She said, "*It's really worth it to think about the process [the activities to implement but being careful, patient with the students, [because] they will also have to go through a process of adaptation."* This shift in perspective and positioning moved her from expecting immediate solutions or "correct" interventions to understanding that uncertainty and resistance are a part of the process.

In Maya's case, she gradually improved at navigating the uncertainties inherent in her classroom interactions, particularly when she faced challenging questions and reactions. Initially, Maya was plagued by a sense of insecurity stemming from "not knowing" what to do. However, as time progressed, she shifted towards more openness, embracing the unknown, particularly those related to students' perspectives. This shift enabled her to approach these uncertainties with curiosity, asking questions and seeking understanding, rather than being paralyzed by her worries.

One interesting indicator we observed was how she recounted a conflict situation involving a student who did not want to eat her lunch despite being hungry. Maya initially attempted to address the issue by speaking directly with the student. The school administration got involved and made things worse by insisting that the student eat. Unlike what she would have done before, according to her, she engaged in a candid conversation

with the two administrators who had intervened, sharing her perspectives and concerns openly. Maya said, "*Look, with the quality of the food the State provides here, I wouldn't eat it either! It's very sad when students need to eat because they're hungry and eat anything.*" One of the administrators was taken aback by her frankness, but the other admitted he had not seen the situation in that light before, and maybe they should rethink their approach.

According to her, at first, she avoided conflicts, which she saw as negative. After reflecting during the meetings, she realized that conflicts are an inherent part of the process, recognizing that they can generate new information and help solve problems; they could be used as a bridge to construct solutions, and should not be avoided at all costs. We can infer a gradual shift in Maya's positioning toward the role of conflicts. This shift was not simply a rationalization on her part, expressing what is socially desirable or acknowledged. What we distinctly noted in Maya – and in Elsa, as well – was rooted in the *affective* quality of their responses. Their affective disposition to consider something anew, to position oneself towards students and colleagues, in Maya's case. They demonstrated an openness to engage in dialogue. Importantly, this openness was not shattered by uncertainties or the unknown, as they found ways to navigate them.

Before concluding this section, it is important to address a crucial distinction regarding the concept of positioning as it is applied in this discussion. Our focus is specifically on positionings arising in the flow of interactions within the group. That is, we refer to positioning to the extent that they are tied to the microgenetic moment of interactions within the group and the interviews. Therefore, it differs from Hermans and collaborators' concept of position(ning), which transcends the here-and-now, connects to ontogenetic time, and composes the Dialogical Self of individuals. Given that our objective was to concentrate on the micro-dynamics of interactions, our analysis positioning, at this micro level, is anchored in the processes of the here-and-now.

Next, we explore the heuristic value of the construct *Affective-Semiotic Atmosphere - ASA* and how the analysis and understanding of the emergence and development of such forms of metacommunicative frames are essential to promote change and development.

3. The Affective-Semiotic Atmosphere (ASA): The coconstruction of a facilitating context for human development

There seems to be an intuitive understanding that environmental contexts may shape people's relationships and interactions. Throughout one's life trajectory, we can discern whether a place or group fosters a welcoming, safe atmosphere or a hostile, adverse atmosphere (ambiance). How does this nuanced comprehension of our surroundings manifest in the dynamics of human interactions, especially within educational contexts?

Scholars within the field of dialogic pedagogy, such as Echeverria (2024) and Molina (2015), have explored the concept of dialogical spaces. To them, this concept refers to structured environments where dialogue can occur—as an intervention of continued training for teachers (Echeverria, 2024), or as pre-service training[10] (Molina, 2015). Alternatively, Wegerif (2013) approaches the concept of dialogic space as a dynamic and interactive environment where meaningful exchanges can take place. Beyond physical locations, these dialogic spaces are conceptual, as in such spaces participants are encouraged to negotiate meanings while listening to each other, asking for help, and opening themselves to the possibility of changing their minds (Wegerif, 2013).

Wegerif (2013), in his investigation of dialogicity on the internet, argues that, even online, dialogic spaces can emerge, highlighting the fact that physical environments may not always be central for fostering such spaces. The internet (in principle) has a participatory

[10] Pre-service refers to teachers who are currently pursuing their undergraduate education and have not yet transitioned into a full-time teaching role, also known as an in-service teacher.

nature, since multiple voices can engage in dialogue. Although we argue that the quality of the dialogue is debatable depending on the forum in which it occurs (written communication or online meetings, small or large groups participating, etc.), Wegerif emphasized the potential to create opportunities for meaningful exchange.

An essential aspect of how environmental context frames our interactions is addressed by the contributions of McDermott (1977), who introduced the notion of "trust relations" between teachers and students. This concept refers to the quality of relations among people, particularly within educational settings. Trust, to McDermott (1977), is not an innate trait of individuals, but rather something that arises from the ongoing and consistent efforts of people to establish shared understandings[11] around how to work together. This idea challenges the notion that some teachers or students are more trusting than others as if it were a personal attribute. Instead, the author suggests that when contexts offer teachers and students the resources to collaborate, a trusting environment may flourish.

Trust is a relational concept (Gillespie, 2008). As Marková, Linell and Gillespie (2007) point out, "Individuals develop the meanings of 'trust' through the process of socialization and communication, acquiring locally relevant systems of social knowledge" (p. 8). Therefore, trusting relations can promote learning because teachers stop wasting time in interpersonal battles of fear and control, and begin to create a space where students trust they are heard and that what is done in class is done with their best interests in mind (Marková, Linell & Gillespie, 2007; McDermott, 1977).

Building upon these concepts, we believe that there is room to elaborate further on the qualitative aspect of these (dialogical) spaces or environments, which address a shared sense

[11] McDermott (1977) also argues for establishing shared consensus, however we prefer not to use this concept because we believe it diverges from the dialogical paradigm we defend in this research. Consensus connotes the general agreement or concord of the majority. Ideally it is wonderful, but in practice the "consensus" is very much imposed from a majority to a minority (even if that is not a minority in numbers but rather in power relations). This is why consensus is a dangerous concept for a dialogical approach.

of safety, trust, and contentment within a group. This qualitative dimension, though elusive, profoundly impacts our interactions. It produces a kind of sensation, an affective disposition that is hard to describe, but usually allows us to discern whether a context is hostile, generating anxiety and avoidance to participate, or if it is welcoming, making it possible for trust to develop. Sometimes, though, the context can be ambiguous and produce a double bind (Branco, et al., 2004). For example, when someone verbally communicates one thing, but their facial expressions, tone of voice, and body posture seem to communicate otherwise, we sense ambivalence and cannot understand the message.

For example, Alex was a participant who expressed such a double bind. While recounting a situation in class, Alex wanted to express his openness towards LGBTQI+ students. He said that when a student entered the class with his nails painted black, he asked "*Hey, what do you want to be called?*" After insisting on the question, the student clarified, "*No, teacher, I just painted my nails. I'm a man....*" This exchange puzzled everyone in our research team, prompting a thorough discussion on how to interpret Alex's positionings. It became clearer when one of us pointed to his choice of words: instead of asking the student *how* he wanted to be called, he asked *what*. This, coupled with his tone of voice and facial expression, suggested the ambivalence in his message. While Alex might have intended to showcase his openness, his actual message came across as conflating nail polish with being gay, displaying confusion over LGBTQ+ identities. Thus, the message was double bound, ambivalent at its core.

Building on this, the concept of frame offers a valuable lens through which to examine this phenomenon. *Frame* is a crucial concept for understanding meaning-making processes, as it represents the creation of a context for interpretation and negotiation of meanings (Bateson, 1972; Branco et al., 2004; Branco, 2014, 2016; Fogel, 1993). Closely aligned with Wegerif's (2013) notion of a dialogic space, *frames* are created by human

interactions within a specific context and are rooted in the affective qualities of the interactions.

As mentioned before, affectivity is at the core of internalization processes. According to Valsiner (2012), “affective phenomena are dynamically complex and often escape description in terms of common language, even the most elaborate ones.” (p. 255). We are engaged in a continuous cycle of meaning-making processes (Valsiner, 2014), and tracing such processes at the micro-level, many times to correctly interpret social messages might be beyond our capabilities due to their complexity. However, we can still identify when a certain social context is welcoming and open to our participation or not.

Based on what was explained above, we propose the use of a construct inspired by the notion of frame, i.e., the Affective-Semiotic Atmosphere – ASA. It can be a pathway to better make sense of the quality of the communicative and metacommunicative frame that is continually cocreated as people interact with each other. This term captures and highlights the essence of the sensations/feelings being experienced and used by people to interpret what is going on, which is difficult to name or verbally describe, yet palpable and real as the current ASA drives our perceptions, feelings, thoughts, and actions in that specific context. Therefore, ASA refers not to an ontological aspect of one person (or people), but to the specific *context* in which people are together with others at a specific moment. It is important to stress here this time reference, because ASA can change as interactions progress throughout the irreversible time. In short, ASA pertains to the quality of the context itself, where people engage (or not) in interactions, negotiating meanings, and sharing perspectives. ASA’s quality, then, is an important characteristic of human communication.

The Affective-Semiotic Atmosphere cannot be reduced to a structured context as the dialogical space (Echeverria, 2024; Molina, 2015) and should be understood as a central aspect of such contexts. That is, when a teacher tries to promote a dialogical space with

students, the chance of success will depend on how they are able to cocreate a welcoming, or affectively positive, ASA. For example, Elsa realized that organizing the class in a circle did not ensure that dialogue would take place, because it is not the class organization or structure itself that would guarantee a positive Affective-Semiotic Atmosphere. The physical organization/structure can serve as a facilitator (as a kind of affordance, see Gibson, 1982), of course, but the planned structure *is not* the (meta)communicative quality of a given interactional context.

As Matusov (2009) and Sidorkin (1999) argued regarding the notion of ontological dialogue, there are no rules, formats, or activities that can guarantee that this type of dialogue will happen. The same is true for a welcoming Affective-Semiotic Atmosphere. Instead, the key factor to look out for is the teacher's willingness to listen and take seriously each student's arguments, along with an openness to consider new perspectives, as well as patience with their students.

Therefore, it is not just a matter of establishing specific formats or strategies that favor dialogue, but rather of monitoring one's metacommunicative signs and attitudes towards others in a given practice or activity, since such signs contribute to creating a certain Affective-Semiotic Atmosphere. It may seem that we are demanding too much from teachers, however, it is not a matter of micromanaging one's actions, but rather, embracing the idea that coconstructing a welcoming ASA is a process that unfolds over time. Although we cannot control such processes with specific actions and strategies, it is empowering to recognize our ability to influence these micro-moments, one by one. By believing in the potential impact of these moment-to-moment interactions, we trust that this approach represents the most effective way to engage others in the desired ASA.

For example, during the brief welcoming we conducted at each focus group session, asking participants how they were feeling, reminding them to get comfortable, had a bigger

impact—according to many participants—than we first anticipated. Drawing from my background as both a teacher and a group facilitator, I have learned to attune to the group's mood and employ strategies to encourage active participation. When I observed participants entering the sessions in a state of agitation or haste, I paused to acknowledge this restlessness directly. Then I proposed, "*Would you join me in taking three deep breaths?*" In some of the meetings, we did just that, in others different centering exercises. Only after asking how they were feeling at that moment did we engage in small talk leading to topics to be discussed.

The interesting feedback I got, later in the meetings, was that some participants were also doing the same with their students. Vivian, for instance, mentioned recommending to a student that they take a quick break to get some water before the class began, upon noticing his agitation. This outcome was surprising, as I had initially considered such interventions to be minor in the context of our broader, and more significant, topics of discussion. The realization that these small gestures (strategies) could affect participants beyond the moment of our interaction, though, underscored the importance of the nuanced metacommunicative aspects highlighted here.

Participants offered different examples of the impact of small gestures in their own classroom. In contrast to a welcoming environment, interactions can also be framed within a hostile ASA, and this increases the chance of miscommunication, making it harder to navigate conflicts when they arise. Maya and Elsa provided examples of this kind. When Maya asked her students to speak a bit about themselves at the beginning of the year, a student asked her *"Why is that necessary?"* This question shocked Maya, creating a wobble moment for her. She lost her footing and was unsure how to respond and felt staggered. She said that sometimes students did not even reply when she talked to them, "*'Hi, how are you?' or a 'Good morning,' 'Good afternoon' (...) sometimes is just met with silence. (…) It scares*

me a little, you know? (...) If we can't even exchange greetings, [how will we] have a deeper exchange during the class?"

Elsa provided another example. When she invited students to form a circle to favor students' interactions, her demand was met with giggles and jokes, as students said, *"It's like a Sociology lesson, teacher!"* and *"What kind of science lesson is this, teacher?"* To that, she explained "*I noticed a lot of resistance from the class, and this made me worry, like, I felt desperate to know 'how am I going to do this different thing if they don't even want it, right?'"*

Both situations experienced by the teachers consisted of moments of wobbling. They became unsure about how to proceed because their planned activities generated unexpected resistance. This does not imply that they were doing something wrong; they just experienced what most teachers do, for students do not always follow our precise plans and resist (Beghetto, 2020; Fecho et al., 2020; Molina, 2015). As noted by Matusov (2018) and hooks (2013) in their teaching practice, students arrive in the classroom with different educational backgrounds. Often filled with experiences of ambivalence in class, power struggles, not being heard, or the premise that education is simply about the transmission of knowledge and nothing more, students' agency is eroded (Borges-de-Miranda & Branco, 2019). Consequently, even when students encounter teachers who value their contributions and foster an open dialogue, their responses may be more deeply related to past experiences than to the teacher's current efforts. Building trust in new approaches takes time and consistent, small gestures.

As Maya later remarked, she began inviting students to stop for a moment to breathe, asking them how they were before each class. After a few weeks, this practice markedly improved the classroom atmosphere. Classes started more swiftly, and the interactions were

more engaging. Maya observed, *"[it's] not that I didn't do that before, but now I do it with more care, from a different perspective."*

Chaudhary et al. (2017) emphasize the importance of interpreting student's resistance as indicative of potential opportunities for development, rather than a barrier. Expanding upon their insights, we add that teachers need to be trained not to be threatened by disagreement but to be able to access what the student thinks and feels, to access their perspective. If there is no disagreement in class, then, teachers should be worried.

When teachers are met with resistance from their students or a response they were not expecting, this can lead them to a moment of wobble – inherently unpredictable. However, we argue that nurturing a welcoming, Affective-Semiotic Atmosphere enables teachers and students to navigate these challenges, successfully negotiating their goal orientations. When divergences or conflicts arise, they do not escalate but, instead, present opportunities to coconstruct novel perspectives and positionings, deriving from their effort to meaningfully understand each other, moving beyond preconceived ideas and beliefs.

Although intentions and goal-orientations are an essential first step, they do not directly translate into practice. Practice unfolds amidst and through the complexities of emotions, beliefs, values, life trajectories, social contexts, external expectations, positionings, and perspectives. The movement from intended practice to possible practice, and finally, actual practice is part of an interactive flow. When we notice a gap between intended goals and actual practices, it can become a source of frustration. But as França-Sá (2024) found investigating the topic of innovation, innovation is not a goal that is achieved, *but an ongoing process* of approximation, reflection, transformation, stability, and back again. Similarly, dialogical practices and ASA are not achieved immediately but through an ongoing process. As Freire (1970) stated, "Praxis is not blind action (…) it is action and reflection" (p. 48).

FINAL REMARKS

This study set out to identify and analyze possible shifts in teachers' perspectives and positionings regarding how to manage uncertainties in conflict involving prejudices and other sensitive topics, by creating and holding an extension course on conflict resolution in the classroom. We sought to better understand how teachers' development unfolded as they strived to navigate relational challenges arising in day-to-day pedagogical practice.

To achieve this, we planned and conducted an eight-week focus group extension course (offered by the University of Brasília), followed by individual interviews four months later. While carrying out research during the COVID-19 pandemic had its challenges, we believe we found ways to leverage the advantages of an online study. This approach enhanced accessibility for participants and amplified the diversity of the group. Additionally, the use of online tools offered us greater management capabilities compared to what an on-site location might have offered, thereby overcoming some logistical constraints.

Building rapport with participants proved to be important, whether the research is conducted online or face-to-face. We believe we successfully cocreated an environment conducive to dialogue, to the extent that participants engaged in discussing the suggested issues and more, constructing a rich data set. The study, of course, had its limitations. Although the online format made participation more feasible for many participants, it also posed a barrier for one of them who struggled with internet connectivity, leading to his withdrawal. Also, conducting the study online limited our opportunities for spontaneous interactions with participants, such as moments at the start and end of the meetings, which can help to build connections and trust within the group. Taking this into account for future research is paramount, as different research formats and methodological procedures will have their specific set of advantages and disadvantages. Given the growing demand and practicality of conducting online studies, it is important to highlight this consideration.

Another difficulty stemmed from the fact that the extension course was offered by the University. This might have introduced a power dynamic conducive to social desirability, possibly concealing participants' genuine perspectives under the guise of what is socially expected or appropriate. However, we view these aspects as intrinsic to any research process, they are inevitable in qualitative idiographic studies (Valsiner & Salvatore, 2008). Our effort, hence, was to offer clarity and transparency regarding our methodological procedures (Brinkmann, 2012; Gaskell & Bauer, 2000) and create a welcoming context for any sort of divergences.

It is also important to stress that data analysis and interpretation demanded many turns and revisions, but we believe our efforts resulted in contributions that have the potential to inspire further explorations and elaborations. One contribution is the demonstration of how instructive it is to engage in closely examining the interactions within a group. We find this particular focus to be relevant for the fields of Education and Developmental Psychology, given that both deal with relational phenomena at their core. Classes, workshops, and educational settings often occur in groups, making it crucial to understand how these interactions shape learning experiences and human development.

Employing a microgenetic lens here, we were able to showcase its value in grasping shifts within fields of meaning. This analytical approach acted as a magnifying glass, allowing us to spot the nuances of the interactions and how they relate to the creation of favorable group dynamics, Affective-Semiotic Atmospheres (ASA), and developmental processes.

Equally central to our analysis was the dialogical paradigm. It not only informed our theoretical framework and epistemology but also our methodological choices. By integrating it in this way, we ensured a coherent and aligned approach throughout the study. The whole experience with the present research fortified our view that adopting a dialogic paradigm in

educational contexts is a starting point to promote human development and cultural changes (Branco et al., 2023; Matusov, 2009; Paula & Branco, 2022b). Especially those changes highly dependent on deeply affect-laden beliefs and values.

Dialogic relations, though, not only refer to people interacting but also include the delicate fabric of their contexts, belongings, and institutions in which they participate, always permeated with the complex dynamics found in human interactions. A dialogical process involving Self and Others not only leads to the coconstruction of beliefs and meanings, but also implies the continuous evaluation of each other, encompassing trust, distrust, judgment of respective actions, and the engagement vs evasion of individual and collective responsibilities (Marková et al., 2020). As Gillespie and Zittoun (2013) point out, "Bodies are the locus and medium of experience, but bodies are not floating mid-air. Specifically, human bodies are firmly situated within institutional practices and complex webs of cultural meaning which are often tacit" (p. 525).

We think our study contributed to this point, aggregating concepts to help in the understanding of human communication processes, as we proposed/highlighted concepts such as *shifts* in *perspectives* and *positionings* – as well as the concept of *Affective-Semiotic Atmosphere (ASA*). *Shift* is a fruitful concept in the field of human development for its ability to underscore the immediate emergence of possible changes. Before observing a significant transformation or rupture in an individual's trajectory, perspectives, or positionings, we can detect moment-to-moment indications of change. These initial sparks can be traced to what seems to make affective-semiotic sense in the moment. It may not indicate lasting transformation, but their emergence is a sxtarting point for exploring, understanding, and promoting processes of human development along ontogeny.

ASA is also a potentially valuable concept, as it highlights the affective quality of a metacommunicative frame within interactions and relations. Moving away from overfocusing

on step-by-step strategies for navigating conflicts and relational issues, to acknowledging the importance of the *felt sense* of the interaction (*Einfühlung*, see Valsiner, 2021), regardless of the specific pedagogical strategy implemented at the moment (conversation circle, play, lecture, etc).

It is important to mention, however, that creating a welcoming Affective-Semiotic Atmosphere does not necessarily bring about dialogue or dialogical interactions. While it significantly enhances the likelihood of dialogue, being a facilitator of the process, it does not directly *cause* it. The point is: a welcoming, pleasant ASA favors willingness to engage with the group, but if the group and its leaders do not believe in the dialogic paradigm itself—i.e., accepting divergence and diversity—the ASA will *not* lead to ontological dialogues, openness, or democratic values/practices. Again, the complex and not deterministic nature of human phenomena needs to be taken into consideration.

The complexities inherent to teaching practices involve acknowledging the challenges associated with the dialogical quality of conflicts experienced in schools, as well as those related to the lack of adequate training for teachers to enable their handling of relational issues. These aspects are understood not as separate categories but as interdependent and dialogically interconnected. Much remains to be explored and investigated on this subject, as it is far from being exhausted.

As the participants themselves pointed out, extending the duration of the encounters for longer than eight weeks could be beneficial, offering more opportunities to explore what additional sessions might achieve, in terms of reflections and the construction of support networks. Inspired by Molina (2015), it would also be interesting to incorporate the use of journals in research interventions. This could be a valuable methodological approach to investigate processes of development and meaning-making, as journals would enable

participants to document their class experiences and observations, serving both as a tool for self-reflection and as a catalyst for dialogue within the group.

Considering the increasing rates of teacher dropout globally, including places like Brazil, the United States, and the U.K., the academic community faces a pressing challenge: how can we address this issue? Future research should explore the reasons teachers leave the profession and try to understand what motivates those who decide to stay. Investigating teachers' motivations for remaining in the profession, along with their perspectives and positionings on their practice, could provide valuable insights into this phenomenon.

Furthermore, conducting research with school administrators could prove paramount. As identified in our study, school administration often presents significant barriers to teachers' practices. Teachers wonder whether they will receive institutional support or if they will be left to navigate challenges by themselves. Exploring this dynamic from the point of view of the administration could offer critical insights into the relational challenges and horizons within schools.

Finally, we acknowledge that throughout the dissertation we repeatedly underscored this fundamental aspect of human development: developmental processes and change are unpredictable. Life is permeated with uncertainty. We cannot control development, learning, or what meanings people will internalize, nor can we guarantee wanted outcomes. And yet, we are reminded of Elsa's words when she said, "*I **really** wanted you to give me a recipe, but there isn't one.*" Her statement, delivered with a smile and a sense of relief, acknowledges the absence of simple solutions or straightforward answers. This realization is paradoxically both frustrating and liberating. It is frustrating because, on the one hand, we may yearn for a clear-cut formula that could make our lives easier, particularly in the intricate realm of education and the daily routines and challenges within schools. On the other hand, dropping the idea

that there are quick solutions to apply, especially when done collectively, is liberating because it opens new paths of possibilities.

Individually we can only go so far, meaning-making processes exist in relation, it is collective. When a group of people engages in dialogue, sharing their challenges and their points of view, they can create collective understanding. Through this process, they can emerge stronger, with a heightened sense of autonomy, of competence in navigating uncertainties and wobbles. This is what has the potential to profoundly contribute to a teacher's practice, for it fosters a connection to what is possible, encouraging exploration and openness in the face of uncertainty.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Resumo expandido da tese em português

PROMOVENDO O DESENVOLVIMENTO DIALÓGICO DE PROFESSORES PARA LIDAR COM PRECONCEITOS E INCERTEZAS

Os professores enfrentam inúmeras incertezas em seu trabalho em sala de aula, principalmente quando os alunos fazem perguntas para as quais não têm resposta ou quando surgem conflitos. Embora muitos professores tenham sido instruídos a evitar tópicos controversos, no mundo polarizado de hoje, não se trata de uma questão de *se*, mas de *quando* encontrarão situações de incerteza ou conflito; cabendo a pergunta: professores devem engajar em conversas difíceis com os alunos ou evitá-las? Clifton e Fecho (2018) e Beghetto (2020) mencionam o papel e o impacto das situações de incerteza no ambiente escolar, como elas podem, por um lado, despertar desconforto e incômodo nos professores, que têm seu planejamento de aula interrompido ou atravessado por situações de incerteza; mas, por outro, podem favorecer oportunidades de promoção de desenvolvimento destes mesmos professores e seus alunos, na emergência de novas possibilidades de atuação docente antes não percebidas.

Clifton e Fecho (2018) adicionam que situações de incerteza podem trazer momentos de *wobble* (oscilar; balançar; cambalear), que ocorrem quando uma ação, inesperada, exige alguma resposta da parte de alguma pessoa (no caso, do professor ou professora). Os autores enfatizam que quando algo balança como a roda de um carro, um prato de porcelana, ou um brinquedo de uma criança, as pessoas notam, e isto as leva a parar para perceber, considerar, e decidir sobre a melhor maneira de agir naquela situação. Os contextos educacionais estão permeados por momentos de *wobble*, situações imprevisíveis que fogem ao controle ou planejamento dos educadores, como, por exemplo, a resposta inesperada de um aluno, uma pergunta que não sabe-se responder, e assim por diante. Clifton e Fecho (2018) afirmam que "quando algum aspecto de nossa visão de mundo *wobbles*, nossa atenção é atraída para este aspecto e para a incerteza que se manifesta, que, com sorte nos compele a algum nível de reflexão e diálogo que nos impulsionará a atravessar a incerteza." (p. 22).

Porém, nem sempre essa sorte se manifesta, e o desconforto e incerteza causados por momentos de wobble pode nos levar à rigidez de nossas crenças, valores e ações, como uma forma de evitar ou nos defender das perigosas incertezas que enfrentamos. Beghetto (2020) define a incerteza como "(...) um estado presente de não saber, uma incapacidade orientada para o futuro de prever com segurança o que acontecerá no futuro, e uma potencial falta de clareza de como dar sentido aos eventos passados." (p. 1). E, acrescentamos, gerando dúvidas sobre o que fazer no presente. Há uma tendência a querer resolver com rapidez a incerteza, pois ela pode apresentar uma ameaça ao sistema (individual e coletivo), configurando-se como um risco. Tanto é que, como aponta Beghetto (2020), professores tendem a, inclusive, fazer planejamentos de aula que busquem eliminar possibilidades de incerteza, detalhando minuto a minuto as atividades, preparando interações com os alunos quase como um roteiro ensaiado numa tentativa de escapar do possível caos que a incerteza provoca.

No entanto, a incerteza é um aspecto elementar da experiência humana (Glaveanu, 2020a), e não há como planejar para que ela não aconteça no contexto escolar, ou em qualquer aspecto da vida. É intrigante, porém, que os autores citados, que trazem tamanha contribuição para a psicologia e a educação no esforço de investigar os processos vividos por professores e alunos na escola, não incluam de modo aprofundado em suas análises, questões que tangem as relações de poder no contexto escolar e como elas se conectam com esses processos. Têm, certamente, desenvolvido teorias e conceitos que contribuem com o desenvolvimento de melhores práticas educativas, e alguns deles como Combs, Park e Fecho (2012) costuram um olhar para sistemas de dominação, mas acreditamos ser muito importante considerar a qualidade assimétrica de poder nas relações que se dão na escola,

tanto entre professores e alunos nas salas de aula, mas também nas relações entre estudantes, que são permeadas por pertencimentos identitários, classe social e outros marcadores distintos. Portanto, nota-se a relevância de compreender as nuances e impactos dessas relações no contexto escolar sobre as pessoas envolvidas, especialmente, para ser capaz de apoiar professores para trabalhar as questões que daí decorrem.

Valsiner (2012) e Toomela (2010) criticam a psicologia convencional por se tentar se provar enquanto ciência e perder de vista seu principal objeto de estudo: a experiência da vida humana em sua complexidade e integridade. A fragmentação, o apagamento histórico e as tentativas de neutralidade estão entre as limitações da Psicologia convencional (Toomela, 2010). Vale a pena destacar a premissa sustentada por Vygotsky (1991) de que os seres humanos são biologicamente sociais, mas nos tornamos humanos por meio de processos de internalização e externalização de práticas e significados em nossas relações com os outros e com a cultura. O autor afirma:

> o [ser humano] é um ser social e, fora da relação com a sociedade, jamais desenvolveria as qualidades, as características que são resultado do desenvolvimento metódico de toda a humanidade. (...) O meio é a fonte de desenvolvimento dessas características e qualidades especificamente humanas (...), no sentido de que é nele que existem as características historicamente desenvolvidas e as peculiaridades inerentes ao [ser humano] por força de sua hereditariedade e estrutura orgânica (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 90).

Por isso, Valsiner (2012) ressalta que perguntas importantes para psicologia cultural devem ser "como a cultura está presente no sentir, pensar e agir humanos? Como os seres humanos guiam sua própria subjetividade por meio de diversos artefatos culturais?" (p. x). Portanto, ao pensar nos processos de desenvolvimento humano que ocorrem no contexto escolar, como os acima citados, é necessário adotar uma perspectiva sistêmica, sociogenética e dialógica, que inclua na análise desse contexto uma elaboração mais aprofundada sobre as implicações das relações de poder entre as pessoas.

Quando nos referimos às relações de poder, estamos alinhadas com a elaboração de Foucault (1979) sobre o poder, que o considera não como uma condição fixa ou entidade localizada em alguma pessoa, lugar ou instituição, mas como dissolvido e arraigado nas relações sociais estabelecidas entre todas essas instâncias, de indivíduos a instituições. Essa noção pode nos ajudar a entender as relações dinâmicas entre professores e alunos nas escolas, afetando as práticas pedagógicas. Se acreditarmos que o professor é a autoridade máxima em sala de aula, responsável pelo seu "controle", então a participação (autônoma) do

aluno pode ser vista como uma incerteza indesejada (Bohoslavsky, 1997; Kennedy, 2005). A noção de relações de poder de Foucault (1979) desmonta a ideia naturalizada de que algumas pessoas têm poder e outras não. O autor aponta a investigação da complexa dinâmica das interações (e relações) em que o poder se manifesta. Ele geralmente emerge de um movimento contínuo de múltiplas forças, tensões e resistências (Foucault, 1979; Chaudhary et al., 2017). O poder "se exerce, se disputa. E não é uma relação unívoca, unilateral." (Foucault, 1979, p. xv).

Portanto, a disputa, a negociação e a resistência das relações de poder não estão fixadas em figuras de autoridade, necessariamente; elas se movem entre e com pessoas de diferentes identidades, posições sociais etc. Portanto, um aspecto que merece ser enfatizado são os pontos de tensão nessa luta pelo poder, que podem gerar *wobbles* (incertezas) que levam a rupturas. Acreditamos que a abordagem da Psicologia Cultural aos processos de desenvolvimento humano tem muito a contribuir para a compreensão desses fenômenos, explorando o surgimento de significados e tensões nas trajetórias de vida das pessoas (ontogênese) (Cabra, 2020) e nas experiências de momento a momento (microgênese) (Lavelli et al., 2005).

Especialmente considerando as tensões existentes nas relações de poder que evidenciam as desigualdades históricas em nossa sociedade, que se aprofundaram recentemente, houve movimentos mundiais decorrentes de ações como *Me Too*[12] e *Black Lives Matter*[13], por exemplo. Esses movimentos trouxeram à tona o debate sobre as diversas formas de violência em nossa sociedade contra mulheres, pessoas negras e não brancas, pessoas LGBTQI+, entre outros. As questões levantadas por esses movimentos estão surgindo com mais frequência em diferentes contextos sociais, inclusive em instituições educacionais. Discussões sobre "o local da fala" (Ribeiro, 2017), sistemas de dominação (hooks, 2010, 2013), descolonização do conhecimento (Bhatia, 2018; Mignolo, 2011; Pavón-Cuéllar, 2021) são alguns exemplos. Em termos gerais, esses debates lançam luz sobre questões que foram historicamente negligenciadas, silenciadas ou excluídas.

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[12] Movimento contra o abuso e o assédio sexual de mulheres criado pela ativista americana Tarana Burke. Em 2017, o movimento cresceu nas redes sociais com a hashtag #metoo como uma forma de evidenciar as nuances da violência contra as mulheres em diferentes espaços. Esse movimento convidou mulheres a compartilharem nas plataformas de redes sociais situações de assédio e/ou abuso pelas quais passaram ou ainda estavam passando. Esse é apenas um exemplo dentro de várias outras ações e repercussões do movimento. Essa iniciativa mostrou o número significativo de mulheres que sofrem esse tipo de situação, e ainda há muito trabalho com meninas e mulheres jovens, que ainda é o foco dos esforços de Tarana Burke. Disponível em: https://metoomvmt.org/

[13] Em 2013, após a absolvição de um policial envolvido na morte de um jovem negro, teve início o movimento *Black Lives Matter* (Vidas Negras Importam). Ele ganhou ainda mais força e visibilidade nos anos seguintes. Esse movimento também repercutiu nas mídias sociais com a hashtag #blacklivesmatter e teve como objetivo protestar contra a brutalidade policial contra pessoas negras. Disponível em: https://blacklivesmatter.com/

As ciências sociais (especialmente a antropologia e a sociologia) e a filosofia têm se envolvido nessas discussões a partir de várias perspectivas há várias décadas; entretanto, a psicologia ainda não participou diligentemente dos debates para construir novos conhecimentos sobre esses tópicos. Nos campos da psicologia educacional e do desenvolvimento, há uma oportunidade significativa para os pesquisadores explorarem os processos subjacentes em situações de conflito (permeadas por tensões e rupturas). Essas situações não podem ser dissociadas das desigualdades estruturais e culturais que permeiam as relações sociais e as expectativas culturais. Aprofundar-se na experiência dos professores, em como eles lidam com esses conflitos, tem o potencial de esclarecer possíveis caminhos para a resolução de conflitos e intervenções frutíferas.

Patto (2015) enfatizou que fenômenos que são normalmente individualizados, como o baixo desempenho dos alunos na escola, são na verdade produzidos socialmente. Sua extensa pesquisa argumentou que as desigualdades históricas – que englobam desigualdades raciais, de classe e de gênero – juntamente com preconceitos em relação às baixas expectativas dos alunos de comunidades vulneráveis e desprivilegiadas, têm um impacto profundo nas práticas pedagógicas dos professores. Patto (2015) revela uma conexão precisa entre as relações de poder historicamente enraizadas e como elas culminam na produção do fracasso acadêmico. Pesquisas dessa natureza extremamente relevantes e apresentam um desafio significativo, pois abordam crenças e expectativas profundamente enraizadas em nossas interações sociais, muitas vezes invisíveis para a maioria das pessoas.

Nesse sentido, alguns estudiosos elaboraram o que chamam de “currículo oculto” (Junqueira, 2010; Miskolci, 2016; Silva, 2002). Ele é caracterizado por práticas, comportamentos e espaços físicos que afetam o aprendizado e o desenvolvimento dos alunos, mas que, em geral, não são percebidos pelos educadores. Esse aprendizado vai além de processos cognitivos, pois envolve relações sociais, valores, crenças e preconceitos. As relações entre professores e alunos, por exemplo, estão repletas de mensagens verbais e não verbais que comunicam aos jovens a atmosfera social/relacional do ambiente escolar, bem como os valores que ali predominam. Se os valores morais e as crenças que permeiam o currículo oculto forem sexistas, classistas, LGBTfóbicos, racistas, esses valores (e preconceitos) tenderão a ser internalizados pelos alunos (Branco et al., 2012; Madureira, 2007; Madureira & Branco, 2012; Patto, 2015). Esses valores, preconceitos e crenças morais é que podem estar na base de muitas situações de incerteza e *wooble* que ocorrem nas salas de aula.

Educadores e educadoras precisam estar atentos esses momentos que podem se tornar oportunidades preciosas para promover o desenvolvimento humano e desconstruir preconceitos, e não de reforçá-los. Em vez de ficarem paralisados pelas incertezas, como os professores podem ser incentivados a dialogar com seus alunos? Especialmente, vendo situações incertas ou sensíveis como oportunidades para promover o desenvolvimento de seus alunos e o seu próprio desenvolvimento? Quanto melhor entendermos as nuances e as características dessas interações, melhor poderemos implementar práticas educacionais mais eficazes e democráticas para apoiar os professores em suas funções docentes. A presente pesquisa é um esforço nessa direção. Assim, contamos com os seguintes objetivos de pesquisa:

Objetivo geral: Ao criar e realizar um curso de extensão sobre resolução de conflitos em sala de aula, buscamos identificar e analisar possíveis mudanças nas perspectivas e posicionamentos dos professores em relação a como gerenciar incertezas envolvendo disputas de poder, preconceitos e outros tópicos sensíveis. Além disso, buscamos conhecer as ideias dos professores em relação à implementação de ações concretas e práticas sociais dialógicas para melhorar o tratamento de conflitos e questões controversas em suas salas de aula.

Objetivos específicos:

1. Analisar as possíveis mudanças nas perspectivas e posicionamentos dos professores com relação às suas práticas, crenças, valores, experiências e expectativas relacionadas ao manejo de conflitos, situações de preconceitos, diversidade na sala de aula e outros tópicos sensíveis abordados com seus alunos.

2. Coconstruir, com os professores, possíveis formas, estratégias e atividades para lidar com questões que provocam incerteza (*wobbles*) relacionadas a conflitos interpessoais, discriminação e preconceitos que possam ajudá-los a lidar com tensões em situações difíceis.

3. Avaliar a qualidade das experiências vividas durante as reuniões com os participantes e analisar possíveis mudanças em seus posicionamentos e práticas.

Para atingir tais objetivos, foi realizado um estudo qualitativo ancorado nos fundamentos teóricos e epistemológicos da Psicologia Cultural e do Paradigma Dialógico. Ambas as abordagens entendem os fenômenos humanos como complexos, dinâmicos e interdependentes da cultura e do contexto. A metodologia na investigação científica serve como uma estrutura no qual investigadores e investigadoras pensam, propõem e realizam as suas pesquisas de maneira sistematizada. Portanto, pensar a metodologia deve ir além da mera aplicação de instrumentos de “colher” os dados ou da procura de dados válidos e

reproduzíveis (Valsiner, 2017). Esta posição é partilhada por Gaskell e Bauer (2000), que defendem que a metodologia é "uma função da orientação teórica do investigador" (p. 337). Por esta razão, a metodologia não é vista como uma ferramenta que pode ser usada e descartada, mas sim como uma componente fundamental do processo de investigação (Valsiner, 2017; Valsiner & Branco, 2023). De acordo com Brinkmann (2012), as ferramentas de um investigador são teóricas, não metodológicas. Essas teorias são instrumentais para navegar no contexto sob investigação, oferecendo lentes através das quais elas podem ser interpretadas e compreendidas.

Assim, foi realizado um grupo focal de oito semanas com treze professores do ensino fundamental e médio. Dado o cenário de pandemia que se apresentava no período da pesquisa, foi necessário realizar adaptações e mudanças que cuidassem da saúde de todos. Embora a realização de pesquisas nesse período tenha tido inúmeros desafios, conseguimos encontrar saídas criativas e que trouxeram também vantagens para o estudo. Uma delas, notadamente, foi a ampliação da acessibilidade e diversidade do grupo de participantes. Por ter sido realizado online, tivemos a oportunidade de incluir professores de diversas regiões do país, dentre elas: Rio de Janeiro, Brasília, Minas Gerais e Santa Catarina.

Ademais, as reuniões online foram estruturadas para se adaptarem às contribuições dos participantes, tendo a flexibilidade como base principal. Embora um planejamento inicial para todas as oito sessões tenha sido desenvolvido, cada sessão foi caracterizada por sua abertura e flexibilidade para mudar e se adaptar de acordo com a progressão das discussões. Nossa abordagem foi ancorada em princípios dialógicos, bem como no ciclo metodológico (Valsiner & Branco, 2023), que orientou as pesquisadoras a manter o compromisso de mudar o planejamento em sincronia com as contribuições dos participantes. Ou seja, com base nos tópicos que emergiam, no que os participantes destacavam, o planejamento das reuniões seguintes eram reelaborados e redefinidos. Isso nos ajudou a coconstruir informações riquíssimas, que depois nos apoiaram na construção dos roteiros de entrevista.

Após quatro meses da realização do grupo focal, foram realizadas três entrevistas individuais semi-estruturadas para obter feedback dos(as) participantes. Nosso objetivo era entender melhor suas experiências, o impacto (se algum) das reuniões e checar nossas interpretações preliminares.

As informações coconstruídas foram transcritas e posteriormente organizadas em dois eixos de análise para apresentação dos resultados, os eixos horizontal e vertical. O eixo horizontal foi elaborado para oferecer uma representação visual que englobasse as informações construídas de uma forma mais ampla, ou seja, ao longo das oito sessões. Nosso

foco nesse eixo foram os trechos de narrativas, citações e sequências de interação escolhidas de acordo com o seu potencial para revelar tensões, contradições que geraram oscilações e indicadores de mudanças coletivas e/ou individuais. Esta visão nos permitiu traçar e articular os movimentos de perspectivas entre as pessoas em diálogo ao longo dos encontros.

Já o eixo vertical consistiu na representação do processo de participantes específicos ao longo das sessões, portanto nos permitiu aprofundar as análises, dado o foco detalhado dos movimentos e participações de duas participantes específicas; nomeadamente, as oito sessões mais a entrevista. Isto permitiu-nos identificar nuances das perspectivas e posicionamentos dos participantes relativamente aos conflitos e incertezas que enfrentaram nas suas práticas. A seleção destes participantes teve por base os seus processos de produção de sentido e significado, que se revelaram particularmente interessantes em termos de possíveis mudanças nos seus posicionamentos e perspectivas. Assim, rastreamos e articulamos os movimentos dos participantes no diálogo, levando em conta os eixos horizontal e vertical, durante as reuniões, identificando tensões, contradições e concordâncias; e analisamos as nuances de suas perspectivas e posicionamentos em relação aos conflitos e incertezas que enfrentavam.

Identificamos que os principais desafios relatados pelos professores estavam menos ligados às interações professor-aluno e mais ligados ao caleidoscópio de relações complexas dos níveis macro (estrutural e institucional) e que refletiam nas relações de nível micro que eles tinham de navegar. O medo e as incertezas sobre possíveis repreensões institucionais ou a perda do controle da turma foram algumas das preocupações que surgiram. Mensagens culturais hipergeneralizadas, restrições institucionais, falta de apoio e treinamento surgiram como barreiras para os professores para sequer tentarem implementar práticas dialógicas em sala de aula. Por essa razão, na tentativa de traduzir as intenções dialógicas em prática, precisamos enfatizar a dimensão afetiva.

Horizontes de possibilidades surgiram dos processos coletivos de coconstrução de significados durante as interações dos participantes, nos quais foram identificados indicadores de abertura que poderiam tirá-los de grandes incertezas em direção a uma maior conexão com o que é possível em cada momento. Também foram identificados *shifts* nas *perspectivas* e *posicionamentos* dos participantes, o que interpretamos, e propomos, como construtos frutíferos para a psicologia do desenvolvimento, indicativos de micro-processos de mudança.

O conceito de *shift*, mostrou-se valioso durante o processo de análise das informações, pois ficou evidente que, nas interações do grupo, os professores expressaram algumas mudanças em suas perspectivas e posicionamentos ao se envolverem em questionamentos,

contrastes, (re)construção e (co)construção de novos significados. No entanto, não poderíamos caracterizar os movimentos que percebemos como mudanças ou transformações não parecia adequado, pois na verdade, o que observamos foram mudanças sutis, pequenas inclinações. Por isso, *shift* pareceu um ter mais apropriado. Observamos indicadores verbais e não verbais dos participantes para identificar esses movimentos que emergiam nas interações através da lente microgenética.

É importante ressaltar que a análise microgenética destaca o valor do exame das interações em um nível granular, pois oferece uma oportunidade única de identificar detalhes sutis que, de outra forma, poderiam passar despercebidos (Branco, 2014; Lavelli et al., 2005). Trata-se de uma exploração qualitativa de nuances, que estão presentes em breves pausas, ênfase no discurso, sinais verbais/não verbais e mudanças (sutis) que ocorrem nas interações das pessoas. No contexto desta pesquisa, as interações ocorreram em tempo real, o que as distingue da análise dialógica clássica do discurso ou da literatura (Bakhtin, 1997; Matusov, 2009). A análise das interações à medida que elas acontecem oferece uma oportunidade única de identificar a *emergência* de um fenômeno, incluindo processos de construção de significado e, portanto, possíveis mudanças (*shifts)* de perspectivas e posicionamentos.

Em síntese definimos perspectiva nessa pesquisa como os pontos de vista gerais inferidos a partir do que os participantes disseram, suas opiniões, visões de uma determinada questão. Já posicionamento(s) refere-se a quem, qual voz subjetiva, está expressando as declarações específicas. Ou seja, a partir de qual posição, histórica ou relacionada a história de cada pessoa são apresentadas opiniões, declarações, sentimentos e perspectivas específicas. Ambos os conceitos - perspectiva e posicionamento - serão explorados mais a fundo na seção de discussão da presente pesquisa.

Acreditamos que nosso estudo contribuiu ao agregar conceitos na direção da compreensão de processos de desenvolvimento humana, uma vez que propusemos/destacamos conceitos como mudanças de perspectivas e posicionamentos - bem como o conceito de Atmosfera Afetivo-Semiótica (ASA). *Shift* é um conceito frutífero no campo do desenvolvimento humano por sua capacidade de destacar a emergência, no tempo microgenético, de possíveis mudanças. Antes de observar uma transformação ou ruptura significativa na trajetória, nas perspectivas ou nos posicionamentos de um indivíduo, podemos detectar indicadores de mudança de momento a momento. Essas faíscas iniciais podem ser rastreadas e observadas até o que parece fazer sentido afetivo-semiótico no momento. Não necessariamente irão indicar uma transformação duradoura, mas sua

emergência é um ponto de partida interessante de se explorar e compreender como podem atuar em processos de desenvolvimento humano ao longo da vida.

A Atmosfera Afetivo-Semiótica (AAS) também é um conceito potencialmente valioso, pois destaca a qualidade afetiva de uma estrutura metacomunicativa nas interações e relações. Deixando de se concentrar excessivamente em estratégias passo a passo para lidar com conflitos e questões relacionais, para reconhecer a importância do sentido da interação (*Einfühlung*, consulte Valsiner, 2021), independentemente da estratégia pedagógica específica implementada no momento (roda de conversa, jogo, palestra etc.).

Concluímos destacando que os esforços na direção da cocriação de uma Atmosfera Afetivo-Semiótica acolhedora são essenciais para o desenvolvimento de uma educação democrática. Os professores são mais capazes de lidar com as incertezas inerentes às práticas pedagógicas e dialógicas quando contam com tais atmosferas construtivas. É importante mencionar, no entanto, que a criação de uma atmosfera afetivo-semiótica acolhedora não necessariamente gera diálogo ou interações dialógicas. Embora aumente significativamente a probabilidade de diálogo, sendo um facilitador do processo, ela não o causa diretamente. O ponto é: uma AAS acolhedora e convidativa favorece a disposição de se envolver com o grupo, mas se o grupo e seus líderes não acreditarem no paradigma dialógico em si – ou seja, incluir a divergência e a diversidade – a AAS não levará a diálogos ontológicos (Matusov, 2009), abertura ou valores/práticas democráticas. Novamente, a natureza complexa e não determinística dos fenômenos humanos precisa ser levada em consideração.

As complexidades inerentes às práticas de ensino envolvem o reconhecimento dos desafios associados à qualidade dialógica dos conflitos vivenciados nas escolas, bem como aqueles relacionados à falta de formação (universitária e continuada) adequada para que os professores possam lidar com questões relacionais. Esses aspectos são entendidos não como categorias separadas, mas como interdependentes e dialogicamente interconectadas. Ainda há muito a ser explorado e investigado sobre esse assunto, pois ele está longe de ser esgotado.

Como os próprios participantes apontaram, estender a duração dos encontros por mais de oito semanas poderia ser benéfico, oferecendo mais oportunidades para explorar o que as sessões adicionais poderiam alcançar, em termos de reflexões e construção de redes de apoio. Inspirado por Molina (2015), também seria interessante incorporar o uso de diários em intervenções de pesquisa. Essa poderia ser uma abordagem metodológica valiosa para investigar processos de desenvolvimento e criação de significado, já que os diários permitiriam que os participantes documentassem suas experiências e observações em sala de

aula, servindo tanto como ferramenta de autorreflexão quanto como catalisador do diálogo dentro do grupo.

Considerando as taxas crescentes de evasão de professores em todo o mundo, incluindo lugares como o Brasil, os Estados Unidos e o Reino Unido, a comunidade acadêmica enfrenta um desafio urgente: como podemos abordar essa questão? Pesquisas futuras devem explorar as razões pelas quais os professores deixam a profissão e tentar entender o que motiva aqueles que decidem ficar. Investigar as motivações dos professores e professoras para permanecer na profissão, juntamente com suas perspectivas e posicionamentos sobre sua prática, poderia fornecer informações valiosas sobre esse fenômeno.

A promoção do desenvolvimento dialógico dos professores é fundamental para o gerenciamento de incertezas e o enfrentamento de preconceitos na educação. Ao abraçar a incerteza e encontrar apoio por meio do diálogo, os professores podem descobrir novas possibilidades e reconhecer os aspectos positivos do desconhecido e da incerteza. Esse processo envolve interações em nível micro e mudanças qualitativas e graduais, em que pequenos gestos e ações consistentes criam confiança e permitem um diálogo honesto, promovendo um ambiente educacional mais inclusivo e acolhedor.