

The background is white with various colorful shapes and outlines scattered across it. There are large, irregular shapes in shades of light blue and purple. Overlaid on these are numerous outlines in different colors: orange, green, yellow, purple, and brown. Some outlines are simple geometric shapes like circles and rectangles, while others are more complex, resembling speech bubbles or abstract forms. The overall aesthetic is playful and modern.

Why seek to understand life in the classroom?

Experiences of the
Exploratory Practice Group

supported by the



The background features several abstract, light blue, organic shapes of varying sizes and orientations, scattered across a white background. These shapes resemble soft-edged blobs or splatters, creating a modern and minimalist aesthetic.

Why seek to understand life in the classroom?

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Exploratory Practice Group

Brazil English Collaboration Call, under the PUC-Rio, FFP/UERJ and Regent's University partnership. The grant was funded by the British Council.

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This e-book is part of the Sustainability of Exploratory Practice (EP) Project in Rio de Janeiro: a case study of former ELT pre-service teachers, developed in 2019, with the support of The British Council, within the scope of the UK-Brazil English Collaboration Call, in partnership with:

- the Department of Letters of the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio):

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- the School of Teacher Education of the State University of Rio de Janeiro (FFP/UERJ): Isabel Cristina R. Moraes Bezerra;

- the Institute of Languages and Culture of Regent's University: Assia Slimani-Rolls.

The purpose of the project was to understand the impact of the principles of Exploratory Practice in the professional lives of in-service teachers of Portuguese and English, graduated at PUC-Rio and FFP/UERJ between 2008 and 2018. The inclusion of Exploratory Practice in our teacher education programs stems from the need for teachers to be more critical, reflective, and aware of the quality of life in the classroom.

In this book, we invite the reader to learn how teachers and students, exploratory practitioners, experience Exploratory Practice in their everyday lives. We believe that the narratives shared herein can also collaborate in fostering the sustainability of the principles of Exploratory Practice.

Contents

Why write a book with a conversational tone?

Because the book was the result of a number of conversations. And, ever since we began to talk about how to write it, various voices were already included. Working together, colleagues of the Exploratory Practice group, teachers – nearly all of them English teachers or from areas related to language teaching – visualized what the format of the work could be. We wanted to base the e-book on the seven principles of Exploratory Practice that serve as inspiration for creating everything we do.

But these principles didn't appear out of thin air. They were written (and re-written) based upon the activities that we carry out in order to understand quality of life in the classroom (and in other professional environments). In other words, we sought to understand what happened in these scenarios ...

By the way, the principles themselves speak to this:

Exploratory Practice in seven principles:

-  Focus on quality of classroom life
-  Work to understand quality of classroom life
-  Involve everybody in this work for understanding
-  Work to bring people together
-  Also work for mutual development
-  Minimize the burden by integrating the work for understanding into normal pedagogic practice
-  Make all of this a continuous enterprise

We can say that each of these phrases seeks to express understandings built through much (very much!) work in the field. Indeed, because in attempting to understand what is happening in places where we work, we end up facing a great many questions. We tend to believe, based upon our experiences and conversations, that teachers, students, coordinators, and administrators are, indeed, filled with curiosity:

Why do I continue to work at this school?

Why aren't students interested in the subject?

Why do we have to accept such aggressive behaviour?

Why do I have to study English when I don't even know Portuguese?

Why don't my teachers understand me?

Why do my schoolmates think I'm a nerd?

Why do teachers cheat and students can't?

But don't get us wrong –
not all curiosity can sound either
problematic or critical:

Why do people like challenges?

Why are our English classes so cool?

Why do all students do their homework?

Why do we need to be loved?

Why do I like team teaching?

Why have I been so attracted to learning with my students?

With so much curiosity adrift, our work, during the last thirty years, has been based on a proposal that seeks to not separate life in the classroom from the practice of research – what we call practitioner research, that is, research carried out by investigating the action practiced. So many hands have been involved that it would be strange, at the least, to speak of exploratory principles without personally recounting experiences told in the original voices.

Often, these voices are represented in posters, because we believe that their construction – with much cutting and pasting, drawing, written passages, and coloured paper giving wings to creativity – is directly related to the idea of “involving everybody in this work”. This isn’t the only way to do it, but here we illustrate the principles with exploratory posters that demonstrate a bit of our process.

We have maintained everything the way it was produced; that is, there may be commentaries in Portuguese or in English that don’t follow the ‘correct’ standards of each language. Note that you needn’t read this book by following the order of the chapters here presented. Just as with the principles that complement each other in practice, without following any particular order, each chapter offers thoughts that you may use however you think best. For ease of reading, we have included translations of the contents of some posters in the Translator Notes, at the end of this e-book.

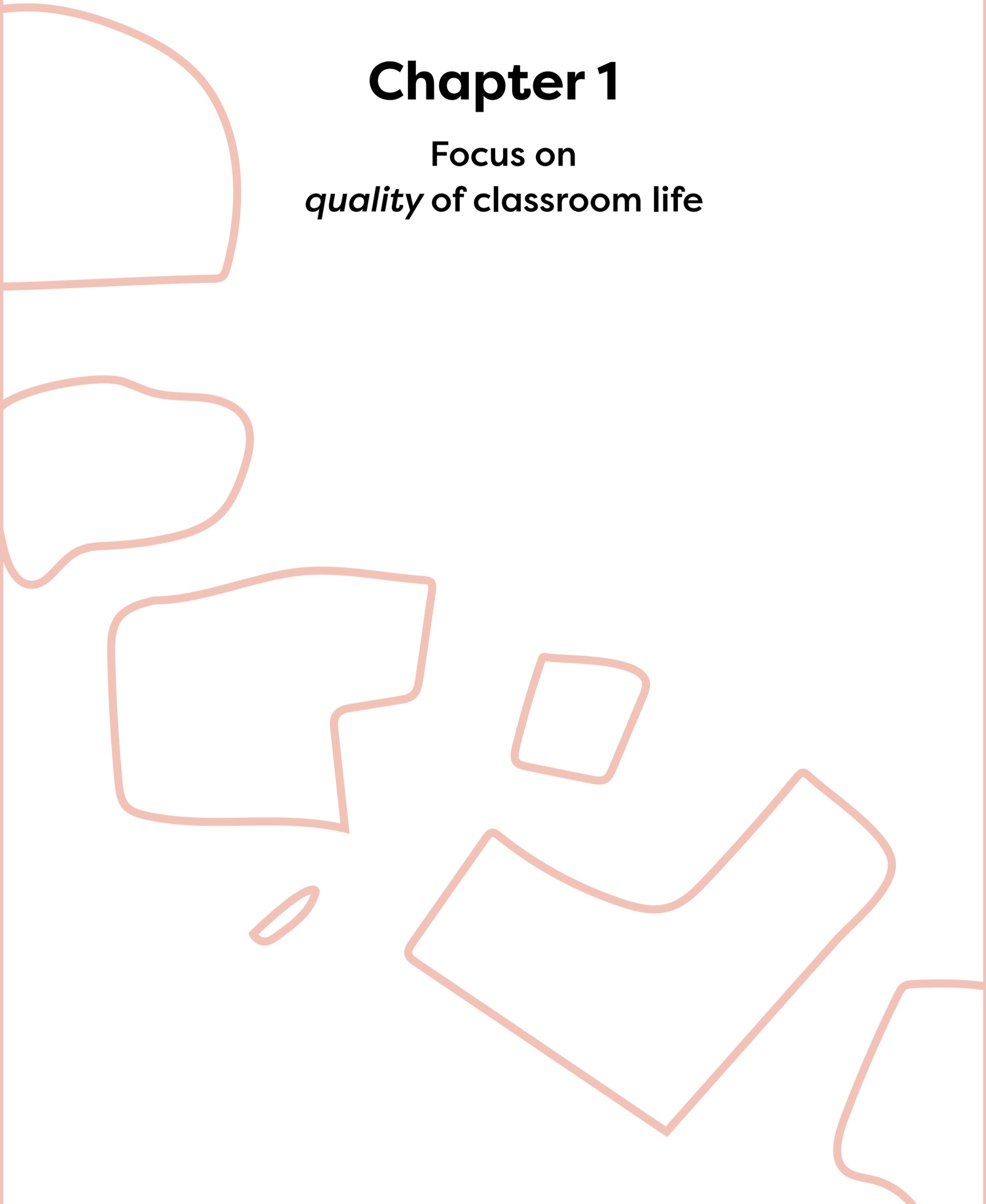
And not only that: we would very much like to in some way include your voice as well. Who are you who is reading these words? A teacher? A student? A coordinator? A researcher? A little of all of this mixed together? We know that you’re curious! So, why write an introduction? Because we want to invite you, throughout this e-book, to participate in a conversation about intriguing questions that go beyond the classroom and other environments. All of our contact information is in the last section of this e-book, and you can tell us what you think. We would love to know!

Welcome!

The Exploratory Practice Group of Rio de Janeiro

Chapter 1

Focus on
quality of classroom life



And what if the questions that occupy the thinking of teachers, students, and other members of the school community were heard and worked on? And what if these challenging questions - or puzzles - were more widely disseminated? What would happen if our concerns were no longer mentioned merely in letting off steam in exchanges in hallways, in chats during recess, or in little notes passed quickly between school desks?

Dynamic, unpredictable, challenging, life demands from us curiosity, creativity, and daring in order for us to keep up with its uncertain turnings, so that we can accept as challenges the difficulties that life sets before us. Very often, we have to work in order to understand what's happening around us. Wouldn't this also be a kind of research?

From our perspective, living means working in order to understand: we talk with friends about situations that bother us; we seek information we lack on sites, in books, and with other people; we organize everything in order that it can be accessible and make sense to us. If we weren't curious, we wouldn't be able to progress very far, right? We wouldn't even be able to find a phone number!

For us, school is (or should be) a reflection of our lives, a place where one accepts, encourages, and works in order to understand the complexity of doubts and questions, the in-

REFLECTING

Why do we separate the classroom from life? Why do we think school is one thing, and real life is another? Why is it that certain problems and curiosities that are part of life (and of daily life in the classroom) are late in being discussed, or are never discussed in the classroom.

completeness and uncertainty of its answers. For exploratory practitioners, schools shouldn't be the place of answers, but rather the place of life; for it's in schools that teachers and students spend a very significant amount of time... living. That is, in all classrooms, right? In both face-to-face and on-line courses, this idea also applies.

REFLECTING

Have you ever stopped to think about how many hours you spend (or have spent) in a classroom?

It matters little whether you work with education or in some directly related area: many of us have spent or will spend a good part of our lives in some kind of classroom. To make it possible for teachers and students, in partnership, to discuss life issues, to live together and to learn from the inevitable conflicts that arise, to construct understandings, negotiations, and knowledge together means to go beyond the blackboard. Learning that people are unique, and that they have their own individual ways to act and to think is an exercise of citizenship. To accept the political role of the school, where each class is an act of liberation means confronting the enormous challenge of working within this vision of everyday school life.

Practitioners of Exploratory Practice (or EP, as we normally call it) are working with language teaching and, at the same time, are reflecting on homework, classroom cheating, teenage pregnancy, school uniforms, being 'a winner', violence, aggressiveness, and many other subjects. Teachers and students can investigate their issues either individually or in groups. School employees can reflect on their professional lives, and parents can try to understand their roles as educators.

Shall we see how they present this work?

Why do we wear an Orange uniform?



TO CALL ATTENTION
AND DISPLAY THAT
WE ARE POOR.
* Para chamar atenção
e mostrar que
somos pobres

...because the way
we wants to pay
tribute to the
teachers
... porque a
gente quer
mostrar que
queremos pagar
tributo aos professores

I find ridiculous
these shirts!
... because it's
not nice



Opiniões do Grupo
Eligamos a cor laranja
de que os alunos das escolas
municipais de Rio de Janeiro não são
satisfeitos com o uniforme que
estão usando. Alguns
alunos ligaram
protestos
para que o
uniforme fosse
mudado.
Todos os entrevistados
acharam interessantes.
E em outras escolas não
usam T-shirt ou polos
verdes.



GROUP:
PRISCILA N: 34
RAQUEL N: 35
CLEBSON N: 3
JEYSSY N: 25
ERICA N: 19

Why do we wear an orange uniform?

2005

Authors: Students of teacher Solange Fish -
Priscila, Raquel, Clebson, Jeyssy and Érica - 6th grade
Albert Einstein Municipal School, Rio de Janeiro.

OK! Remember that we talked about posters? Well, this one, Why do we wear orange uniforms?, was created by a group of 6th grade students of the Albert Einstein Municipal School in Rio de Janeiro. They were students of teacher Solange Fish. At that time, uniforms for students attending municipal schools were still orange, the same colour as those of the city's street cleaners, and the students weren't happy with this. It was a good opportunity to work on possible prejudices toward different professions.

The creation of an exploratory poster is a process that can involve a number of people. In this case, five students, Priscila, Raquel, Clebson, Jeyssy, and Érica, concluded that "the students of Rio de Janeiro municipal schools aren't satisfied with the uniform they are using. Some students carried out protests so that the uniform be changed". Designing the poster took the time that was necessary – or what was possible within the context, right? Often, students who create posters present them at Annual Exploratory Practice Events, which is an added stimulus to finish them.

But of course a poster doesn't serve only this purpose! As nice as it is to see students presenting their work at an academic event (and these, one should note, are open to everyone), creating an exploratory poster involves expressing in a physical form the many understandings that are created when a group of people get together to explore an issue.

After they're 'ready', the posters are discussed in the classroom, at events, and may even be presented by other people – which tends to lead to new understandings and new questions.

WORKING TO UNDERSTAND

In order to create the poster about orange uniforms, the student-researchers interviewed their fellow students and gave their own opinions. While working in an English class they arrived at the conclusion that all of those interviewed were unhappy with the uniform, besides having collected some interesting opinions such as how wearing the uniform identified them as poor (or such as the perhaps ironic “the mayor wanted to honour the street cleaners”).

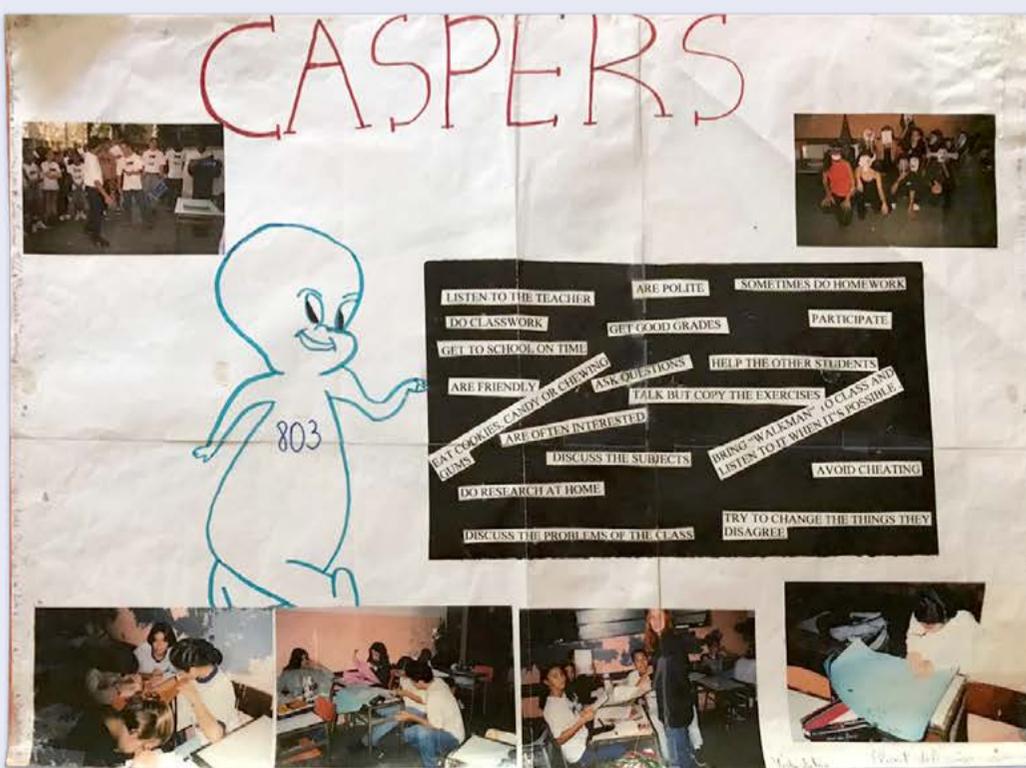
Have you noticed that carrying out a task such as this opens up all kinds of possibilities for discussion? And all of this without leaving the classroom, without abandoning the subject matter, and using what's available. The fact is, it's what happens while planning the poster – when we reflect upon and negotiate different approaches and presentations of each question – that gets at the heart of what we call working to understand. Of course, as we have said, not every such task results in a poster: they may result in conversations, discussions, a video, a theatre piece, a sculpture, or any other kind of exploratory expression. For this kind of expression, there's no limit!

A question from a teacher (“Why are my students so undisciplined and uninterested?”) and the reaction of a student (“Teacher, the problem is that you would like to give classes to angels and we... we are devils!”) could provide an opportunity for a listing of typical actions of angels and devils, for the use of frequency adverbs, for the affirmative and negative forms of verbs in the present tense, and for the vocabulary necessary for describing actions such as: “Angels get very good grades; Angels don’t chew gum; Vampires cheat in tests; Vampires never study”. It also opened up an opportunity for the creation of a third character, the friendly ghost – “Caspers avoid cheating; Caspers sometimes do their homework” –, for the discussion and negotiation of attitudes and for in-school research by groups of angels, devils, or vampires and friendly ghosts, with their record photographed.

EXPLORATORY EXPERIENCES

A question from a student: “Teacher, why do Brazilians insist on speaking English?” could generate hours of reflection on the origin of names (Wesley, Winnie, Phillipe, of students in Julia Lima’s class); the motives for selecting the name of a child; the beliefs about Brazilian and foreign cultures; besides motivating the exchange of ideas between parents and students, teachers and other school employees.

Let’s take the opportunity here to take a look at this record.



Angels, Devils, Caspers -
Who's my student?

1998

Authors: Walewska Braga
and 9th grade students
of the Dr. Cócio Barcelos
Municipal School

Posters such as these can also be used as teaching materials in subsequent classes, in classes of other subjects, or even in extra and remedial classes. In the latter case they make it possible to transform traditional content review environments into learning clinics, where the focus goes beyond earning a passing grade and permits students to reflect on study habits, causes of low performance, and individual issues that lead to school failure.

According to student Calvin Tamanqueira, this task “[...] stimulates us to learn English because we do everything in English. We do research, and this makes English classes and culture more dynamic. The learning is better because it’s something more interesting for you to learn. And everything that’s in the poster is interesting to us, it’s about us, about humanity, and it’s this that makes it interesting and not just for us, but also for other people who come to see us. [...] You have fun. You laugh, and enjoy it. Posters deal not only with English, but with ideas in general. And this has an influence on our everyday lives.”

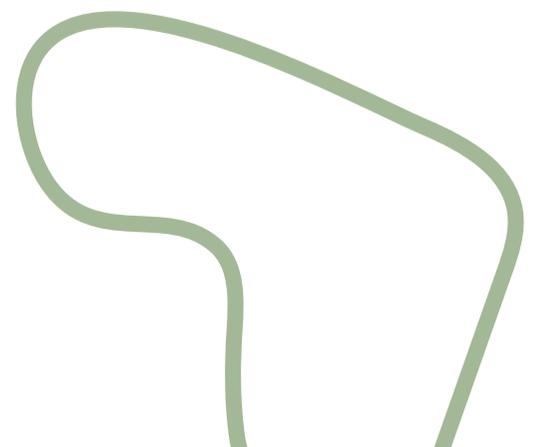
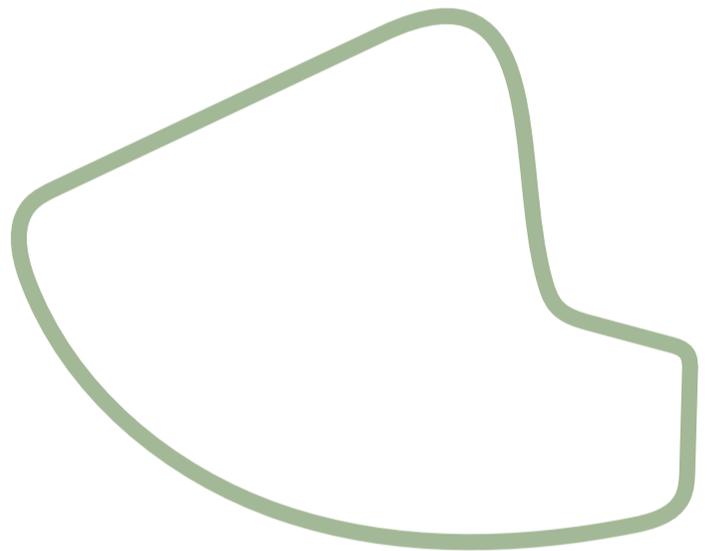
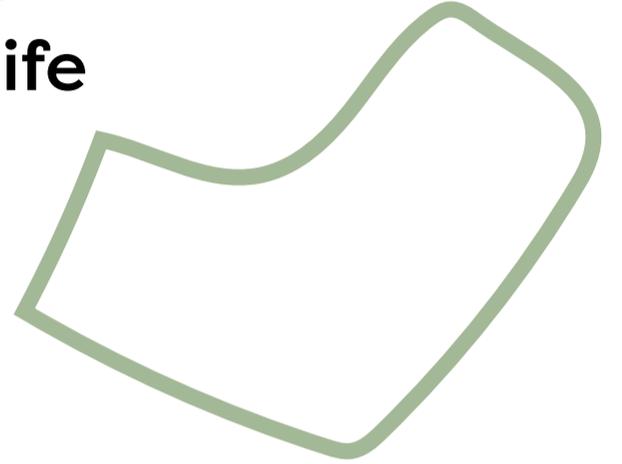
Well, by this time you’re probably thinking: “Great! I like it, but then, all the work to understand is placing everybody together creating something related to issues that come up in the classroom?” Well, in regard to this ‘work’ thing, we will talk a bit about it in the chapter that follows.

OUR UNDERSTANDINGS

Placing the quality of life above all else isn’t merely a cool way to make a subject matter, whatever it is, more attractive. It is, first of all, a way to remind all of us who are involved in classroom practices that what we experience with is important, and that there’s no real division between ‘life’ and ‘classroom subjects’, between ‘life’ and ‘school’.

Chapter 2

Work to understand
quality of classroom life



As we said in Chapter One, we identify ourselves as practitioner researchers. We investigate our own practice, and this, you can be sure, creates a great deal of work! But when we talk about our ‘work to understand’, at times we hear questions such as “Why work to understand and not to arrive at solutions?” or “So, you just reflect and discuss issues?” These questions arise, of course, when whoever asks them still hasn’t perceived all the work involved in the construction of exploratory posters.

As for the question of arriving at solutions, it seems to us understandable. Every day we hear very complicated news about the state of teaching, of education, and besides this, we feel the effects of such news on our own practices. Who wouldn’t say that there’s much to be resolved? Stopping at merely understanding can seem to be a waste of time. But we believe that, even before resolving anything, we need to know what the problem is. If a teacher says that there’s a lack of discipline, for example, his or her students may think something else. It’s worth listening to everyone, isn’t it? After all, both positions are valid. And if, in the case we present, it’s the students who are undisciplined, this problem can only be approached with their participation, right?

REFLECTING

Why do we tend to believe that work is merely something that leads to some kind of objective result? - whether in the form of money, grades, solutions to problems, or irrefutable conclusions?

REFLECTING

Why is it that year after year, the problems most cited in regard to classrooms continue to be the same? Could it be that all of those involved in the school community see these problems in the same way? Why don’t we ask people about this more openly?

During these thirty years, we have observed that when a group of people works to understand a question related to life within the environment in which they live, they create links that can aid in overcoming what before was seen as an insuperable problem. Whether practitioners discover creative solutions through which they do in fact overcome the problems, or because the understandings created in this interaction reconfigure their previous environment, transforming the relation between them, and thus their daily practice.

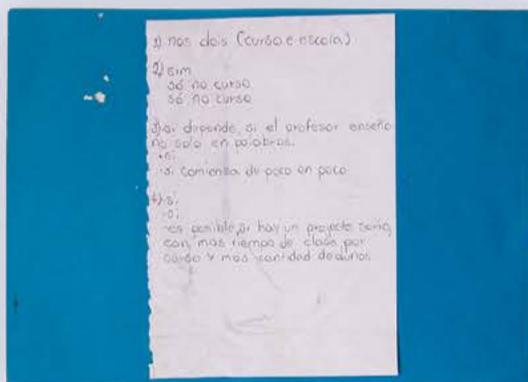
But wait! We don't want to make false promises. The focus on quality of life doesn't lead to magic solutions. Nor does it point toward recipes for success. In fact, our use of the term "quality" brings with it a feeling for experience, and not necessarily an improvement. We have worked diligently and daily! –, concerned with outcomes, goals to be fulfilled, and various indicators of progress. What we are saying is that when this intense work produces an understanding of what is happening in the lives of those involved, opportunities are created for that community to fully explore the space and time available to them.

EXPLORATORY EXPERIENCES

In 2018, teacher Walewska Braga, who today works at the São Tomás de Aquino Municipal School (RJ), noticed that her eighth grade class arrived late and hungry for her first morning period English classes. She thought, therefore, that she could take some cookies and other snacks to the classroom, inviting students to sit in a circle. On these occasions, besides learning expressions for requests in English, everyone talked about what was happening and investigated the labels of the product packages, reading their listings of nutritional content. There was one student, recently arrived from Medellín (Colombia), who also taught her and the rest of the class how to say some expressions in Spanish.

In this group, future teachers enrolled in the government-funded Teaching Initiation Program (PIBID) also joined the classroom activities. At the end of 2018, Walewska and the ‘Pibids’ (as they were affectionately nicknamed) asked the class to reflect on the year’s work and to think about the coming year. What would they like to see happen? What contributions, desires, and expectations would they have for their 9th year?

The activity went quickly. The students wrote their impressions as small notes that were left over from an Exploratory Practice event. They had already had the experience of creating a poster about their group circle hour, presenting it on more than one occasion. That day, the notes on expectations generated a series of posters entitled “We don’t want just food. We want food, a chat circle, fun, and art!”, as we can see below.



Circle Chat Hour

2017

Authors: Walewska Braga, teacher participating in the government-funded-Teaching Initiation Program (PIBID/PUC-RIO) and students of the São Tomás de Aquino Municipal School: Jerson Alejandro Pedreros, Héllen Moreira, Ana Júlia, and Maria Paula Pedreros.

WORKING TO UNDERSTAND

It's easy to see that the class brought up a number of issues. As Walewska says: "A bit of everything, right? A better classroom with wi-fi and air conditioning (and why not?); the presence of the 'Pibids'; more demanding teachers; snacks; the circle chat; more subjects in the curriculum: computer science, music, drama. Open-air classes, music and videos with subtitles, and less work in groups, since some people learn better alone (great!!!). The poster was presented at an Exploratory Practice event and, when it came time to write a summary, it occurred to me that the title should have to do with that song by the group the Titãs: people don't want just food, etc."

It's worth noting that between Walewska and her students, a very own methodology was created: a series of actions that made up an overall learning activity, totally integrated into the daily life of the class, and following steps that worked for that community. In short: they perceived that within what they were doing, there was a great potential to be explored – from the moment of the first circle chat to the creation of the poster that we saw.

When she read the notes filled out by her students, Walewska was very pleased and proposed that their hopes be organized into categories such as food. In EP, we usually call exercises such as these Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities (or PEPAs, for those in the know). They are activities in which the practitioners perceive that, through a collaborative effort, they can understand more about their issues.

Work is an element that unites us within an educational institution. One way or another, we are all working actively, for without its participants, a school wouldn't exist. We work, whatever the functions we carry out may be, or whatever are our opinions about the problems of teaching. We work, sharing different ethnic-racial, gender, religious, or other identities. And when we re-invent or re-plan our work so that it helps to explore our issues or what piques our curiosity, this work grows in meaning for all of those involved.

We, the participants in this workplace, include all who are there: students, teachers, coordinators, principals, administrative personnel, maintenance and entryway personnel, parents, care-takers, legal guardians, etc. We understand that we are all there in order to develop teaching and learning activities that are relevant and meaningful for our personal and professional development and that bring us pleasure in doing so.

You must be curious to know what else happened with the so-called "circle chat hour", aren't you? Could it be that they were able to resolve some of their problems, even if the initial objective was to work in order to understand? Walewska tells us that a se-

ries of posters remained on the wall of the English classroom throughout 2019. "Even if we weren't able to get wi-fi and air conditioning," she said, "we watched movies with and without subtitles, worked a lot with music, and had our moments in the open air. It's interesting that one often hears (in the teachers' room, in meetings, in the halls) that students don't want anything, and this wasn't the case. They demonstrated that they want more. One can see that students are ready for a partnership. What excellent pedagogical coordinators they would be... They know very well what they want."

By the end of 2019, the initial circle chat no longer existed. The snack questions continued: “Would you like...?” “Yes, please”, and “No, thanks”, but the class was divided into four groups, each accompanied by a “Pibid” who planned the activities to be proposed in class with Walewska. At that time, there were more ‘Pibids’, and the initial group that presented the posters of the ‘circle group’ had also grown: along with Kayke and Giovana there were Alejandro, Héllen, Ana Júlia, and Maria Paula.

All students participated in the planning meetings with the ‘Pibids’ and in the Exploratory Practice meetings (at PUC-Rio) whenever possible. Of course, with the end of the year arriving, it was time to once again think about everything that they had done (and about their future). Walewska’s question was “Why change?” What would the students have to say about this? She also thought that the question “Where is the teacher?” would come up, given that the ‘Pibids’ had come to occupy this role, and she wasn’t always in the classroom. She participated in a project with another group, and that was her only time available to meet with the Portuguese teachers involved.

Can you guess what the students said, evaluating the changes? “A new format in class and more learning”, Walewska tells us. “We learned more; the classes were more dynamic.” And 2020? What format would it have? “A big question, since they were going on to secondary school”, she said. “New schools, new friends, new teachers, new challenges! The learning circle turned out to be a unique moment for the group... It didn’t stop; it evolved. Great, isn’t it?”

Undoubtedly, really great! Principally, perceiving all of the stories and relations that are constructed between people in a process such as this – they involved two years of understandings. Speaking of this, at times, when we relate such stories, educators are charmed (or a bit frightened) with some of their aspects. Teachers and ‘Pibids’ planning with students? Students and future teachers being the protagonists? How does this happen?

The next chapter has to do with this.

Chapter 3

Involvement everybody
in this work for understanding



REFLECTING

Why is it that the relations between teachers, students, coordinators, and school employees can generate so many conflicts? Why don't we collaborate more with one another, since we are all affected by these conflicts?

One thing that we have noted during our collaborations to understand is that many practitioners of pedagogic activities don't feel safe in the classroom environment or in teaching environments in general. Of course, in many schools there is a very concrete issue in regard to the physical safety of everyone, but in principle, we're talking about something else.

We have observed (and felt!) that the school environment can be very risky, while we, let's say, navigate through it. This certainly doesn't help in any way if our objective is to involve everyone, constructing productive working relations.

But risky in what way? Well, for example, teachers may be concerned with what students might say, do, or how to behave in case they could participate in planning classes. Students may not say what they're in fact thinking, feeling, or planning to do, since they fear the reaction of their teachers, coordinators, or of some school employees.

Imagine a scale from zero to ten (0-10). What do you consider or considered more risky (ten) as a student in a classroom? And what is/was the least risky (zero)? Raise your hand to ask a question? Be too quiet (or disappear)? Not do your homework? Question the teacher? Oppose the opinion of your classmates? Be really friendly with the teacher?

Share your beliefs? Why?

At this point, you may be thinking: “OK, but that may seem that everyone is scared to death all the time. We know of various examples, of teachers, employees, as well as students, in which they act out their tensions on one another. And they verbalize this very well!” This in fact does sometimes occur. And it could hardly be any different: if we live in a situation of eternal risk, one day we explode, right? Pressure cooker style!

EXPLORATORY EXPERIENCES

Do you recall Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities, the PEPAs? OK! Once, Inés Miller and Bebel Cunha, who have been part of the Exploratory Practice group since its beginning, created, along with public school students, a PEPA in order to approach the question of safety. This involved a ‘riskometer’; that is, a kind of thermometer indicating what types of actions were considered to be more or less ‘risky’ in the classroom.

The idea of a ‘riskometer’ was enthusiastically accepted, helping to construct many understandings out there – beyond the PEPA carried out with the original group and its various presentations at events, other teachers also decided to apply it, adapting the concept to the context in which they worked. Feel free to do the same (even if you’re not a teacher). Long live the ‘riskometer’!

In this PEPA (and in its developments) what stood out most was the kind of activity considered by students to be of ‘low risk’ in the classroom: not calling attention to yourself, staying quiet, in sum, pretending that you’re not completely there. Of course, some students may even choose ‘high risk’ behaviours on purpose: human beings are vast in their diversity, aren’t they? But just knowing that the classroom was understood to be such a ‘risky’ place was food for thought. Better still, work for understanding...

WORKING TO UNDERSTAND

Once, Bebel was working on a language teaching project for 5th grade students in a public school in Vidigal (RJ), when she noticed that the students used the expression “black chicken, white chicken” whenever they wanted to obtain something. For them, it was a sure thing! Saying “black chicken, white chicken”, resolved even the most risky situations. She decided, therefore, to propose a PEPA to them in which they recalled situations related to the expression – and this ended up being a poster as well.



Galinha preta é a adintração
Galinha branca da sorte

Os meninos T. e L. e J. da nossa turma

Cualquer pessoa Any person

Em ocasiões especiais para dar
boa sorte ou má sorte

Porque elas não tem o dom

Caio e Rodrigo

Galinha preto e que da sorte
Galinha branco e má da sorte

Qual a sua?
Os meninos (os boys) da turma 8º B.

Por quem dizem?
Any person

Quando dizem?
Para sorte.

Por que acontecidos não dizem?
Porque não comem arroz cozido.

Qual a origem?
Caio e Rodrigo inventaram

One day I was in PE class and my friend said "black chicken" and I flew. (R.)

When the Geography teacher was reading the grades, C. and R. were near the table saying "black chicken and white chicken". They said I was going to get a 10 and I got a 10! (G.)

A INVESTIGAÇÃO / ALGUNS ENTENDIMENTOS

1. Why do you work in separate groups: boys and girls?
1. Porque eles fazem tudo de qualquer jeito e mal feito e as meninas não.
2. E porque as meninas são caprichosas e os meninos não tanto.
3. Eu acho que os meninos não são entendedores.
4. Eu acho que os meninos não são entendedores.

2. What are the origins of this expression?
1. Uma imaginação maluca da cabeça e deu a origem a brincadeira.
2. E que os garotos queriam algo engraçado e acharam que galinha era mais engraçado.
3. A origem foi de uma brincadeira.
4. A origem veio de uma brincadeira.

3. Do you have other forms to wish good luck? With chicken?
1. Ver um gato preto e fazer um pedido.
2. Se você vir um frasco preto, cruze os dedos, apia um pedá e até ver um cachorro, não pode desgrudar os dedos.
3. Eu cruzei os dedos.
4. Cruzar os dedos vai dar sorte.

4. Luck and success. What is it to be a successful student?
Do you need luck to be successful?
1. Tem um pouco a ver.
2. Não, você tem que fazer a sua própria sorte, estudando.
3. Não tem nada a ver.
4. Não tem nada a ver, você tem que ter inteligência.

5. Why does Bethel want to know about all this?
1. ---
2. ---
3. Porque a Bethel ficou interessada em saber.
4. Porque ela achou engraçado e bem tratado.
5. ---
6. Porque ela estava curiosa.

Handwritten notes in Portuguese: "alguns os meninos não são entendedores e por isso gostamos de fazer brincadeiras", "a origem é vem de uma brincadeira", "que são várias superstições mas que são muito comuns", "Amanhã vou fazer que sorte não tem nada a ver com cachorros", "Porque se os meninos que respondem".

What is this?
Who uses this?
To whom?
When?
Do girls say it?
Why NOT?
Who INVENTED?

One day, at PE (Physical Education), my friend could not pass the test and I said: "black chicken, white chicken" and he finally passed the test. (C.)

We were recording the Mother's Day song and the boys said "black chicken and white chicken" for us to sing well. (J.)

Deborah Cunha
Ramon Costa
Caio Botelho
João Douglas
Isadora Santos
Amanda Pinheiro
Gabrielle Pereira
Julia França
Thaiane Gomes
Curso de Inglês Educari

Black Chicken, White Chicken

2007

Authors: Ramon Costa, Caio Botelho, João Douglas, Isadora Santos, Amanda Pinheiro, Gabrielle Pereira, Julia França, and Thaiane Gomes.

There were eight students in the class and much rivalry between the boys and the girls. Moreover, there was a belief in the expression “black chicken, white chicken” that, as the poster shows, began with a joke. For Ramon Costa, Caio Botelho, João Douglas, Isadora Santos, Amanda Pinheiro, Gabrielle Pereira, Julia França, and Thaianne Gomes, the expression had the power to raise grades, improve musical performances, and even to help students answer questions from the teacher or to pass P.E. tests.

For Bebel, “the most interesting thing is that, when they presented the poster at an EP event, they became enthusiastic and began to ‘pass on black chicken, white chicken’ to people: they placed their hands on the heads of others to pass that incantation, that power, on. When we went to lunch, there was a special on ice cream bars in which some sticks were marked as winners. Well, I bought one for each of the students. The boys recited ‘black chicken, white chicken’, and the girls didn’t. As it turned out, their sticks were winners, and those of the girls were not!”

Magic apart, the story of “black chicken, white chicken” can help us to understand about this idea of involving everyone in tasks in order to understand; not only because students have their own ways to deal with the problems and risks they confront – at times much different from those their teachers expect –, but also because this shows that involvement can only take place through listening.

OUR UNDERSTANDINGS

It’s difficult to involve everyone in a collaborative task if we don’t listen. But hearing the questions of others, as well as talking about our own questions, may be perceived as risky. When we work together for understanding, however, to the extent that we construct a space that’s safe for exchange between participants, the perception of some of these risks changes.

This is what Sabine Mendes says, commenting on the link constructed with the Exploratory Practice group: “the feeling that I have is that I want to continue on because I have always sought a place (or places) where my curiosity could be satisfied and my questions heard, valued, and where I could hear about what enchants and intrigues other people as well, in order to seek partnerships.”

Besides being an English teacher, Sabine is an activist. When she did her master’s degree she ended up constructing a PEPA together with members of the social movement in which she participated at the time in order to understand the functions they carried out there. That’s right, this type of task doesn’t occur only in schools! And, even in schools, it doesn’t occur only in classrooms. There are instances about what happens in coordination meetings (carried out by Eliza Borges), psychology sessions (as proposed by Carolina Apolinário), and in teacher meetings (as with the case of Mydiã Freitas), for example.

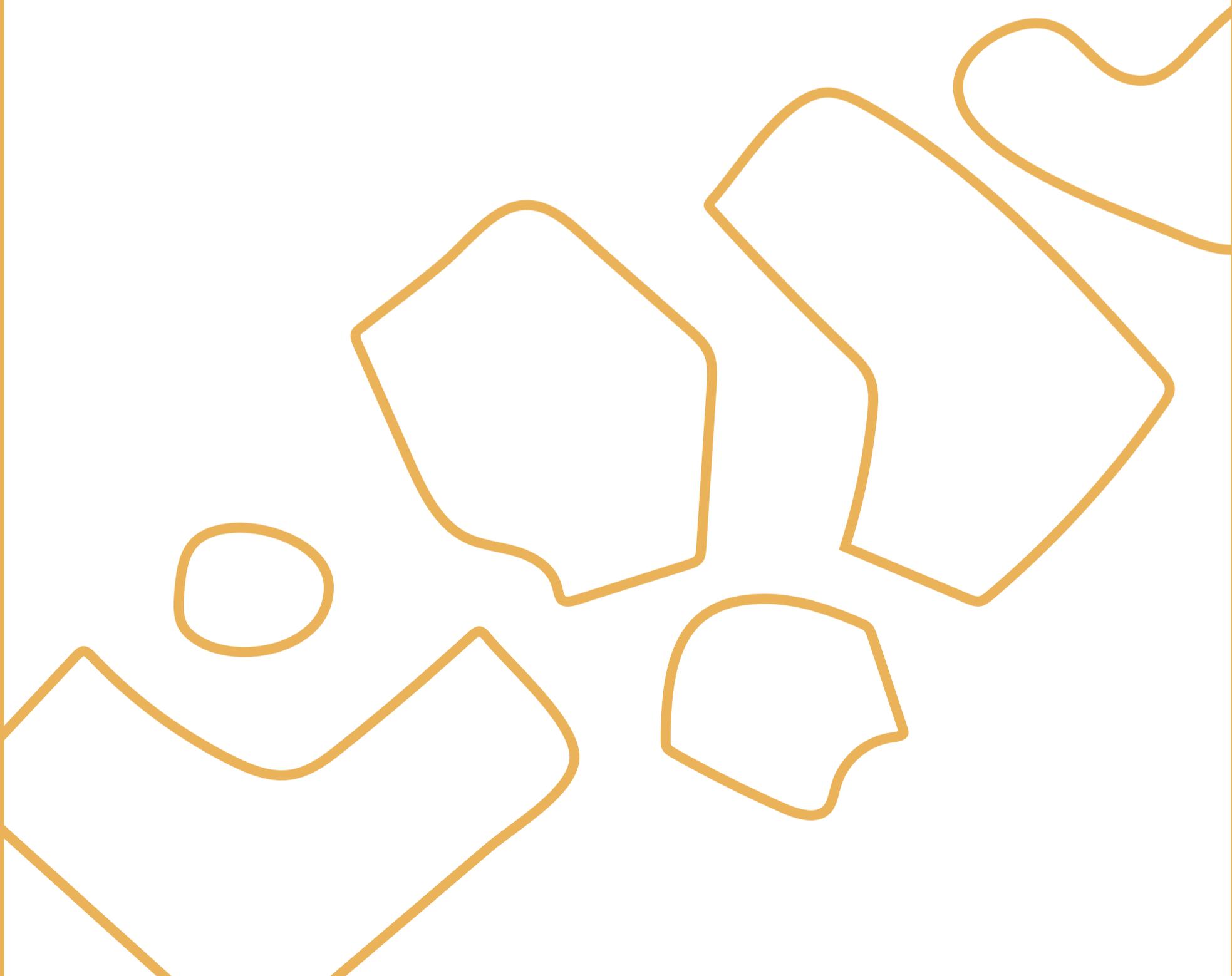
Through listening, the involvement of an increasingly large number of practitioners, dedicated to different functions, becomes possible – inside and outside the school. Walewska, who we met in Chapter 2, says that Exploratory Practice offers a “safe haven for creativity”. For her, in the Exploratory Practice group, “everything is always so welcome! I found my space. I got out of the box of empty methodologies and classroom rules created by people who had never been in a classroom.”

As Bebel puts it, “the interesting issue here is precisely not to push away anything that’s part of life.” Perhaps some might doubt the validity of working with ‘black chicken, white chicken’, but to this she responds: “Is it superstition? Is it a baseless belief? But it’s part of the lives of the students, isn’t it? You may not believe in it, but they do – and they are also critical at times, making fun of themselves in the poster, due to not knowing how to explain how the expression works. I think it’s interesting to see how they expressed themselves so well about this”.

You’ve no doubt noticed how this kind of work generates a strong sense of unity. We’ve noticed that as well. Exploratory practitioners usually work to intentionally construct this kind of union. They seek partnerships in their practices, and it’s about these that we will talk in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Work to bring people together



The posters and the Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities (PEPAs) that we present here open the way to many new questions, including the very process of carrying them out. We are often told about how each experience took place, and we've shared among us posters and understandings, analysing them in search of common characteristics. When we address these questions, we end up becoming so involved with this that we also want to investigate what happens when we are being exploratory practitioners.

This is because we always place union at the forefront. Besides working together, we work with the intention that union will take place. It's clear that the questions noted above have no single answer. But during a fast-paced school day, any teacher, student, or school employee may forget that wanting to or not, building relations is part of his or her function. After all, any group task depends on the relations established among those involved.

So, when we propose to intentionally work toward the union of all, the process tends to become more fun. In any teaching and learning environment, there are questions – not discussed, but very evident – in regard to how people behave, about how they feel, and about how they think. Such was the case of Andrea Wilhelm, an English teacher in a language institute who didn't understand why her students didn't do their homework. Before working on this issue, there was a certain problem of expectations vs. reality that, due to not having been discussed, ended up affecting the relation between practitioners in the classroom.

REFLECTING

Why do exploratory practitioners like to do things together? Because we like to collaborate? Because collaboration makes everything more fun?

After creating a PEPA in order to understand her issue with her students, Andrea summarized their understandings: “We didn’t finalize our question of understanding our puzzle. I don’t even believe to have caused a change of behaviour in regard to homework. But certainly we initiated other questions to be contemplated, moving on to reflections that permeate a classroom with affective relations.”

REFLECTING

Why do we think that we will obtain results only if our initial expectations are met? Why don’t we count the construction of affective relations as part of our work if we work with/in groups of people?

Have you noticed, moreover, that we begin many questions with “why?” This isn’t by chance! We believe that more objective questions (using “what”, “how”, “which”, “how many”) tend to overly limit the possibilities of listening (to our own understandings and the understandings of others).

But why is this so? Yes, another why. Well, we can only speak from our own experience. Imagine, for example, that you were teaching a language course and were assigned an intermediate level class. But, upon interacting with the students you noted that they presented a series of difficulties in their oral and written presentations that, in your opinion, didn’t correspond to that level. What would you do? Why is it so common for us to find ill-placed students in our classes? And how could we work for the union of all involved in the understanding of this kind of question?

Since the topic of the course book unit they were working on was “family” (with all of the vocabulary related to the theme), Ruan decided to expand the material from the book by asking a discussion question: “If this group were a family, who would be who?”. As Ruan himself says, “an oral activity would be a great opportunity for me to offer feedback on pronunciation and rhythm, besides also providing me with tools in order to analyse how these students viewed themselves in the classroom and which family roles they would assign their classmates”.

Often, learning material may not be in sync with what’s happening in the classroom. This ends up separating teachers and students even more, given that they may be interested in quite different things. Since we want to work toward union, expanding or adapting lessons can transform them into opportunities for the understanding of more relevant issues; especially in environments where goal fulfilment in terms of the number of chapters and pages given is an important factor.

EXPLORATORY EXPERIENCES

Teacher Ruan Nunes became acquainted with Exploratory Practice in a Graduate English Language module at PUC-Rio. At that time he was experiencing the very situation that we have just described. He says, “the relation with students had improved, but it was still difficult to deal with people who didn’t speak in class; especially since it was a large group and with adolescents very much different from one another. Since I was already working with ways to make the classroom environment more enjoyable, with show and tell sessions of skills, and chat moments on subjects selected by them, it didn’t seem so strange to me to choose an oral practice exercise. I was sure that my students would refuse to write, in case I asked them, so speaking about that subject seemed the way to go”.

This is what happened with teacher Adriana Nóbrega. Much like Ruan, she was working with a group of adolescents when they came to a unit in the book that dealt with everyday activities in the future, a subject completely disconnected with the interests of the students. The purpose of the unit was, of course, for students to use the future tense and modifiers in a grammatically correct manner. But the students didn't appear to be at all interested. Some even demonstrated indifference to the text, while others made jokes about the future objects presented in the book. Therefore, Adriana decided to ask them:

“And how do you think life
in the future will be?
Do you have expectations?
Do you imagine anything?”

You might imagine the rest: the students were enthusiastic and they all had something to say. Adriana distributed small pieces of paper for them to record their impressions. The results are below (also organized into categories, which ended up being a super interesting PEPA).

Life in the future

We

- will I be good?
- what will be good?
- why will I have to be good?
- will I be tall?
- why will you have to be tall?

House

- what will I eat?
- will we have food?
- where will I sleep?
- where will you live?
- what will you do?

Life

- why is future important?
- what will I do?
- when will I live?
- where will I study?
- where will I work?

School

- what will be in the test?
- when will the test be?
- when will you turn on?
- why will I turn on?
- will you be my teacher?
- will you be my student?
- when will I be a good student?
- why will you be good?
- what will be my grade?

where **when**
what **who**
why
will we
be

Me

- who will I be?
- what will I be?
- where will I be?
- when will I be?
- why will I be?

Family

- who will be my baby?
- who will be my wife?
- will I get married?
- why will I marry?
- who will be my boss?

Death

- will I die?
- why will we die?
- where will we live?
- will we live in space?
- will we live in violence?
- what violence will be?
- where will violence live?

School

- will we study at schools?
- why will we study?
- why won't we use the computers and study?
- will I have to study Math?
- will I have to study English?
- why will you work?
- where will I work?

Adriana Nóbrega Kuschnir
adriana@excelrio.com.br

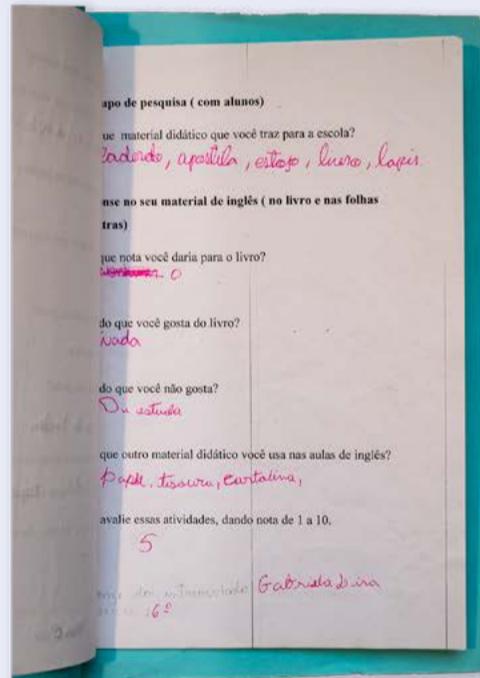
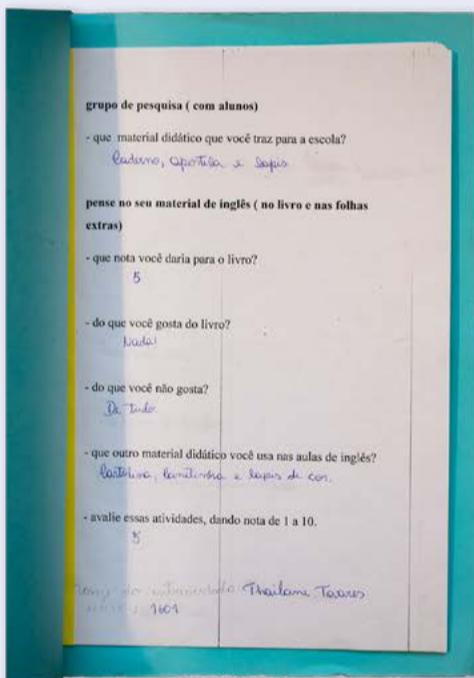
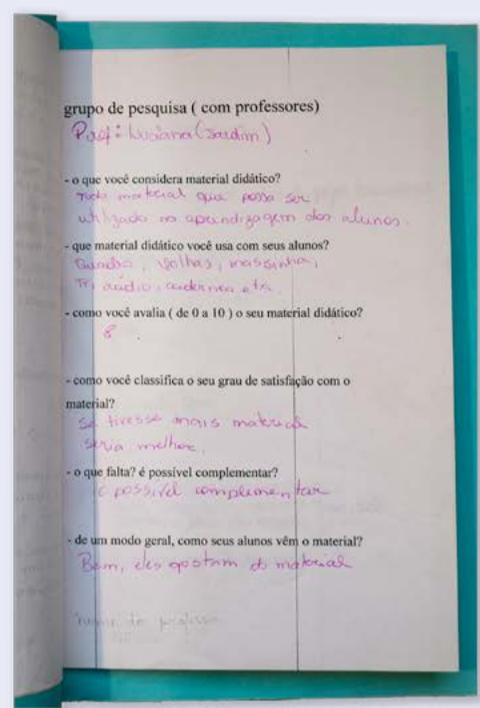
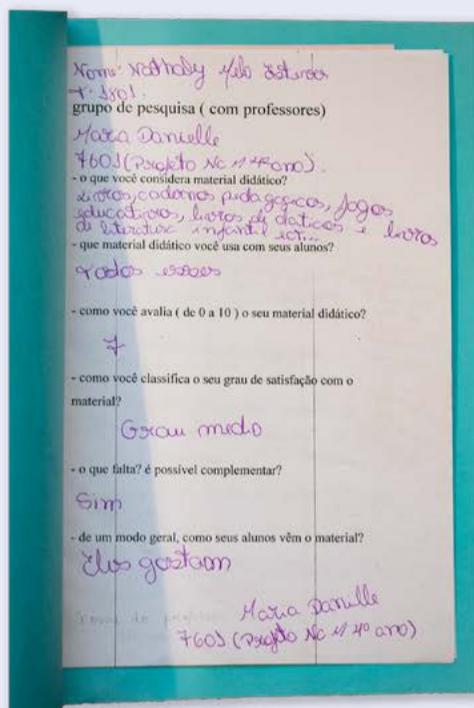
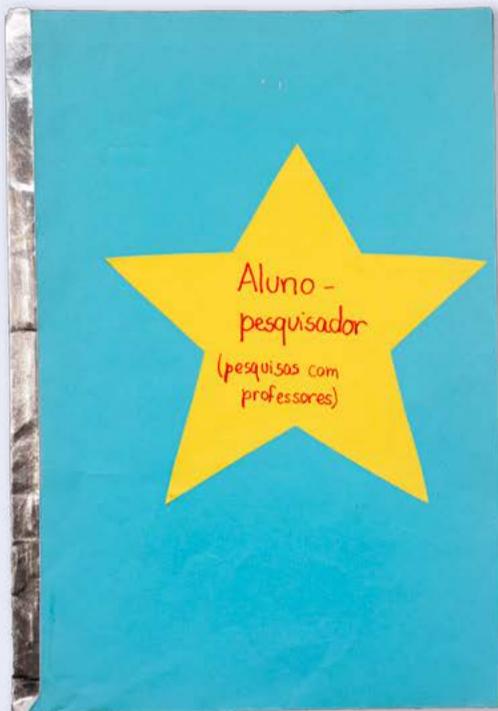
Life in the future

2004

Author: Adriana Nóbrega

Clearly, the students not only worked with the interrogatory forms of the future tense (without abandoning the language objective of the lesson), they also worked on subjects that intrigued them when they thought about this future. Questions such as “What will be my grade?”, “Who will be my baby?”, “Will I die?”, and “Where will violence live?” are important and extremely relevant themes for all those involved, which tends to make the activity much more interesting.

Ruan and Adriana worked in language institutes, but in schools the question of the course book can also arise as a barrier to union. Teacher Walewska, who you already know from other chapters, says: “learning materials are a problem. They are never completely satisfactory. The teacher thinks that they have to be closely followed, the complaints are so many”. On a certain occasion, the books that were used were so far from the reality of the students, that they themselves decided to investigate the problem. Thus, the following poster emerged.



Student researcher

2013

Authors: Maria Danielle, Thailane Tavares, and Gabriela Lira
 (8th grade students of the São Tomás de Aquino Municipal School)

For further details, see the Translator Note number 1 at the end of the book.

WORKING TO UNDERSTAND

Maria Danielle, Thailane Tavares, and Gabriela Lira were Waleska's 8th grade students when they became aware of the question of their teacher, and they decided to interview other former primary school teachers and other students, talking about teaching materials. Walewska says that, besides being happy with their involvement, "it was also interesting to see this gap: teachers said that students liked the material that was being used. But students criticized the English textbook chosen by the municipal government".

A while ago, Walewska decided to begin to use the English language books selected by the National Teaching Book Program (PNLD), not yet implemented at the time of creating the poster. But she did so in a different way: when the textbooks arrived for her to choose, it was the students of each class who decided what would be adopted. As she herself says: "Students know all about textbooks."

OUR UNDERSTANDINGS

Working for the union of all, based on each person's questions, transforms the work environment and helps to decrease the distance between the roles that all of us fulfil in educational institutions. This tends to make our practice more entertaining, since we are involved in intentionally constructing affective relations.

You may think that Walewska's proposal is very risky – we already treated the question of risk in Chapter 3. And what if students don't choose the 'right' book? And what if they choose a book that the teacher doesn't know how to use (or with which he or she isn't comfortable)? What happens when this responsibility is shared, if, in the end, the responsible party continues to be the teacher?

These are very valid questions, and the story told by Ruan can also help us to understand them. When he asked his students who was who in the imaginary family, Ruan also opened himself to being placed in disagreeable roles. And what if they criticized him? And what if they criticized other students? How would he handle this situation?

As Ruan himself tells us, things became so complex “that even a student would be awarded the role of the dog in the imaginary family. The nearly ten minutes of discussion were indisputably useful and offered me questions about my own performance that I hadn't previously considered.” His PEPA ended up becoming the subject of his graduate course monograph.

And here the most interesting point comes to the fore when we speak of working for the union of all. Just as Walewska learned about textbooks and Adriana discovered a relevant way to deliver her subject, Ruan questioned his own practice through the metaphor of a fictitious family. The risk was there; but it was shared, as was the responsibility.

In case Walewska's students complained about the material they themselves chose, or in case Ruan's family ended up being an excuse for an exchange of offenses, these questions of the quality of life in the classroom could also be worked on in class, but neither would be alone to deal with them. In Exploratory Practice, teachers and other school employees, as well as students, are understood to be practitioners in constant development.

We will talk more about this question of shared learning in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Also work for mutual
development



REFLECTING

Why do we fear to make mistakes in the classroom if we know that we are always learning? Why can't students, school employees, parents, and volunteers teach as well, if they are always learning different things than the teachers know?

In Exploratory Practice, we understand that everyone who carries out an activity together is always learning. It doesn't matter what function is indicated on your name tag, id, or contract; all are key developing practitioners.

Are we exaggerating? Not really! We want to work in order to understand life in the classroom (and in other professional contexts). For this reason, taking into account the views of everyone merely contributes toward our understanding. Moreover, the focus of collaborative work also brings with it a special interest in how we can help one another.

The previous chapters have already offered an idea of what we can learn when we seek to listen to everyone. But imagine what would happen if, instead of avoiding risks, we understood that everyone's questions are important and that we are all learning.

REFLECTING

Why do we judge other people for not doing their work? Why do we seek the guilty and the innocent?

If we all contribute to the school context and we are all in a learning situation, working for mutual development is a good idea. We can criticize the attitudes and actions of teachers, students, other school employees, or of families, creating 'sides' with which we identify. But we can also support the development of who is already collaborating with us every day. Often, in teaching and learning environments, the distance between practitioners is the result of expectations associated with each 'post' or 'function'.

Recalling the time when she taught in secondary school, Sabine says that what most bothered her was hearing the opinions of some of her colleagues. They said that the adolescents were not able to understand, at that time, what their teachers were doing; but in the future they would thank their teachers for everything. "I imagined myself, an old lady with hair in a bun and with a cane, smiling at a student, already an adult, who I met on the street and who thanked me", she says.

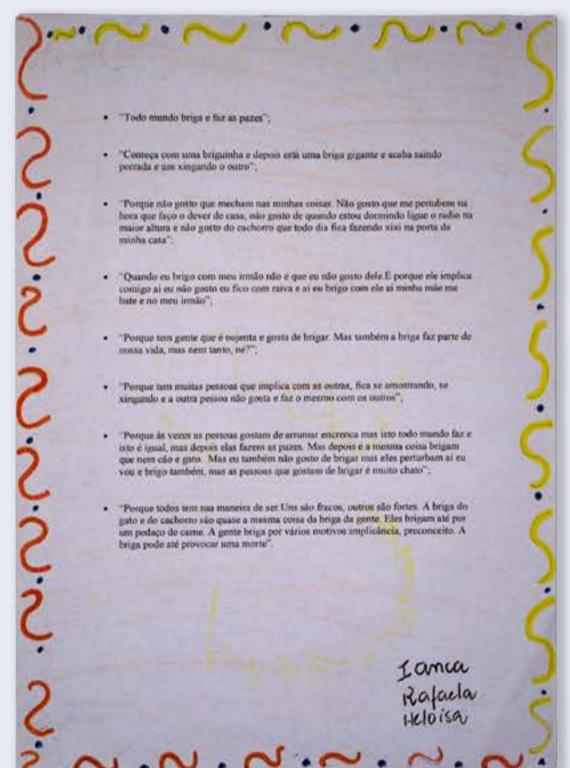
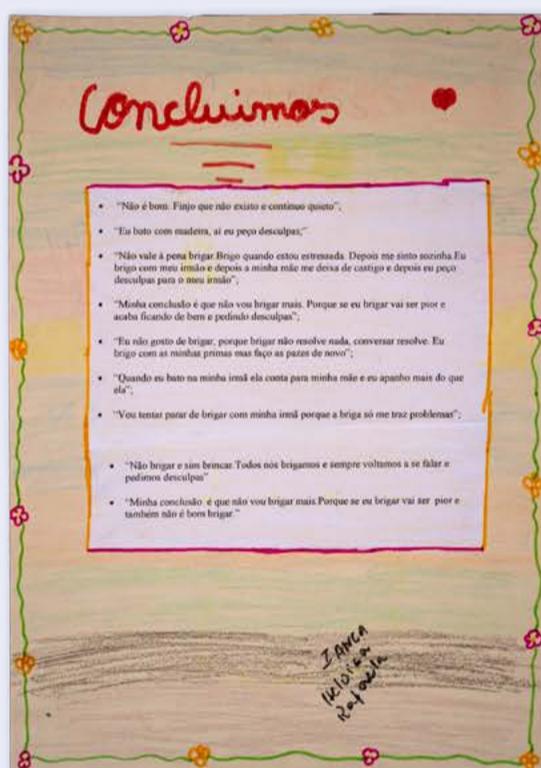
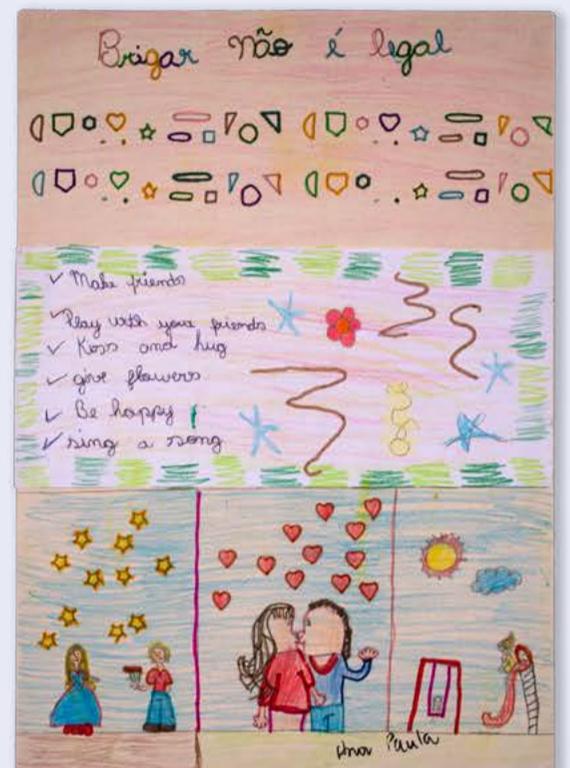
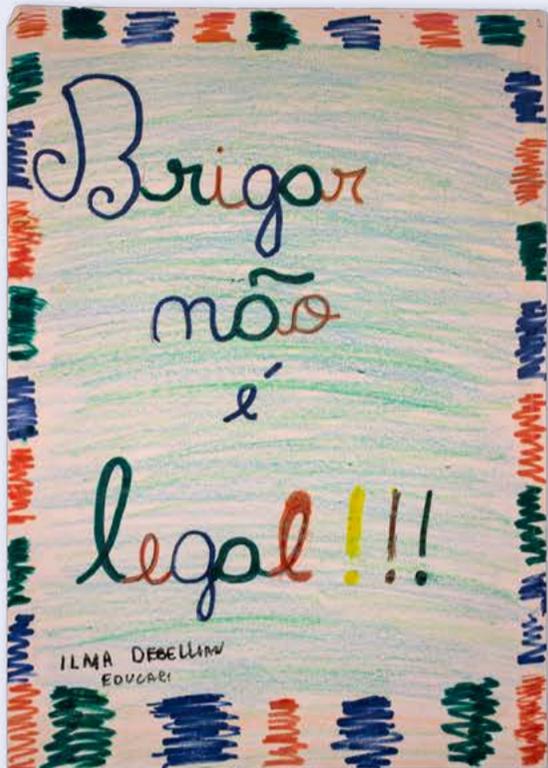
She thought: "No!! We're throwing away an opportunity to learn! Why can't it be interesting now? Because of the curriculum? Lack of time? Damn! But this interests neither me nor the students, I'm doing this only for fear of losing my job. But what if I came clean? Life would be much more varied and interesting!" For Walewska, this type of barrier is broken with Exploratory Practice, in which work-

REFLECTING

Why do we believe that teachers and other employees of a school can develop good plans for their students without consulting them?

ing for mutual development offers an opportunity where "everyone acts and everyone explains. All together".

The students of Ilma Debellian, who at the time taught English at an NGO, worked with statements and drawings in order to understand some of their behaviours. For example, on the poster below, the question was "Why do we fight?"



Fighting isn't cool

2007

Authors: Janca, Rafaela, Heloisa, Ilma Debellian.

For further details, see the Translator Note number 2 at the end of the book.

EXPLORATORY EXPERIENCES

Ianca, Rafaela, and Heloísa were about 10 years old when they made this poster. Besides the work with English action verbs (with a focus on positive actions), they noticed that they didn't feel good after fighting (ending up feeling sorry for the person with whom they had fought).

From examples such as these we note that it's not only teachers who are interested in issues of discipline. We also note how questions related to the quality of life go beyond the classroom, pointing toward the potential that we all have to contribute toward the environment we live in and, in general, toward the lives of one another. After all, isn't the idea to not separate the classroom from life?

For this very reason, it's no use to force getting along together: the development and feeling of belonging comes from the work itself based on real questions. We already mentioned a good example of this in these pages. Do you remember Andrea Wilhem – the teacher who wanted to know why her students didn't do their homework? OK! The Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activity (PEPA) that she helped to construct ended up involving many people and treating the question of the guilty and the innocent in regard to homework.

Andrea used a theme of a unit of her textbook – one that treated laws and their related punishments – in order to talk to her students about homework. She decided to end the unit with a simulated jury! In regard to this activity she said: “a student volunteered to be the defendant accused of not doing homework. There was also a defence lawyer, a prosecuting attorney, a judge, and a jury.”

Besides noting many points of view – which later were part of her specialization monograph – Andrea also felt that she opened a real dialogue about the theme. “I shared with my students the concerns of negligence to do homework, and after the simulation they reached the conclusion that in spite of not having done the homework, they recognized its importance as part of evaluation, and also for success in learning English”.

But it didn’t stop there! That activity ended up generating a second PEPA, when the group was invited to give a workshop at the Annual Exploratory Practice Event. It was called “Homework: Innocent or Guilty?” According to Andrea, “my students organized the classroom space in order to present to a workshop group and invited different people from the audience to participate. Students and teachers of different schools played the judge, the prosecuting attorney, the defence attorney, the mother and father of the accused student, the friend of the accused, and her teacher. The rest of the workshop group made up the jury.”

In case you're worried about the verdict, we can say that, happily, the student was found not guilty! As is the custom in this type of workshop, which by the way was very entertaining, it was followed by an open discussion involving all of the participants, in this case about the experience of that 'court'. Everyone came out well, and the understandings constructed through collaboration transformed the teacher's relation with her class.

Of course we've heard all kinds of things in regard to this intense listening process! Part of such an invitation is for everyone to grow together, opening up opportunities for issues that, apparently, may not be related to the subject matter that we teach. This is what happened with Walewska's students around the year 2000. As she herself says: "During classes I constantly heard students say that it was impossible to obtain good grades on math tests, concerned as they were with grades and with failing".

This was an urgent matter, and a newspaper headline of the time became a point of contact between working to understand and the creation of a poster. Walewska took the newspaper article to class, shocked by the report that even today is current. It said not only that public school students didn't know math, it said that they would graduate not knowing math. "We read it together. We discussed it. We reflected on the subject. So, I proposed that they carry out research in school to see what was happening".

A group of students accustomed to participating in Exploratory Practice meetings at PUC-Rio, also interviewed teachers from there, and ended up with much reference material. You can see the result below.

Por que é difícil aprender matemática?

Mais da metade dos alunos não sabe matemática
 Dados do Saeb mostram que situação é mais grave entre estudantes do 3º ano do ensino médio da rede pública e privada

Alunos saem da escola sem saber matemática
 Mais da metade dos alunos brasileiros não consegue aprender matemática, revelam os dados do Sistema Nacional de Avaliação da Educação Básica (Saeb) da Educação. Na 3ª série do ensino médio, chega a 69,0% a proporção de alunos com desempenho crítico ou muito crítico nessa disciplina. Os dados são de 2007. Página 13

“ESTOU TENTANDO MELHORAR MINHAS NOTAS EM MATEMÁTICA, MAS TÁ DIFÍCIL...”
 (Tihago, Escola Sto Tomás de Aquino, turma 702)

O que os alunos dizem

- na sala de aula: copiam e fazem os exercícios
- em casa: refazem e lêem os exercícios
- gostam de trabalhar com outros colegas
- as matérias mais fáceis de tirar boas notas são ciências, artes e educação física: é só gostar e ler um pouco
- a partir da 5ª série as matérias ficam mais difíceis

O que os professores dizem

- foram todos bons alunos na 7ª série
- mas tinham dificuldades - prof. de matemática:ciências; prof. da PUC:geografia; prof. de história:ciências; prof. de inglês:artes
- como melhoraram: lendo, refazendo os exercícios, fazendo resumos e questionários, estudando todos os dias, tirando dúvidas com os professores e amigos
- alguns professores eram chatos
- alguns professores não explicavam direito
- os professores passavam muito dever

Dicas para os alunos

- aproveitar as aulas: prestar atenção
- fazer resumos da matéria
- brincar menos, levar os estudos a sério
- procurar gostar da matéria

Nossos entendimentos
 (Ana e Tihago)

- matemática preocupa os alunos da Sto Tomás de Aquino
- reprova muita gente
- as notas de matemática não estão boas nas turmas da tarde (602,702,802)
- as notas também não estão boas na PUC
- é mais fácil tirar nota boa quando se gosta da matéria
- fazer trabalho com os colegas é bom: um ajuda o outro e assim vão aprendendo
- os professores dizem que antigamente se estudava mais
- as coisas não mudaram muito: tinha professor legal e professor chato; matérias fáceis e difíceis, professor que não explicava direito e etc...
- está difícil melhorar as notas na 702
- muita gente tem dificuldade em matemática

Ana Raquel entrevistou 11 alunos das turmas 602, 702 e 802

Tihago entrevistou o professor de matemática, um professor de engenharia da PUC, as professoras de ciências, inglês e geografia

Foi fácil fazer as entrevistas, mas teve gente que não quis responder; não teve nada difícil. Aprendi com os meus colegas que, a gente gostando ou não, o estudo é e será sempre importante para o nosso futuro e para o futuro do nosso Brasil. (Ana Raquel)

Gostei de entrevistar os professores: Quase todos os professores foram simpáticos. Um ficou nervoso (sempre fico) quando apresentar o pôster. (Tihago)

Why is it hard to learn math?

2004

Authors: Ana Raquel, Tihago, São Tomás de Aquino Municipal School

For further details, see the Translator Note number 3 at the end of the book.

Walewska says that “the interviews generated a work of reflection”, producing data about “difficulties, preferences, study habits... We had some varied rich material.” While making the poster, a student suggested that its visual content also be related to math. Ideas cropped up.

The students Ana Raquel and Tihago presented the poster at the Annual Exploratory Practice Event at PUC-Rio. It was a way to approach an important subject for the growth of all, besides investigating the famous phrase, “math is in everything we do”. “I saw students making calculations, making change at the beach near the school... Some of them worked around there, helping their parents”, says Walewska. “At the same time, at joint class teacher meetings I noted the concern of teachers regarding low student performance, with the resulting and undesirable low grades. Considered to be a priority (along with Portuguese), with a high hour load in the curriculum, the teaching of math has always been a major issue”.

It seems that when we consider all of those involved in teaching practices as key practitioners in development, able to work together in order to understand, we advance as well in terms of personal growth. Dick Allwright, one of the creators of Exploratory Practice, often says that these key practitioners share some characteristics, many of which we see here in recalling these stories. In 2009, he wrote a book with Judith Hanks, another Exploratory Practice teacher, summarizing these characteristics for us.

OUR UNDERSTANDINGS

We are all learners, whatever point we are at in our work for understanding. Allwright summarized learner characteristics in five propositions:

- "Proposition 1:

Learners are unique individuals who learn and develop best in their own idiosyncratic ways;

- Proposition 2:

Learners are social beings who learn and develop best in a mutually supportive environment;

- Proposition 3:

Learners are capable of taking learning seriously;

- Proposition 4:

Learners are capable of independent decision-making;

- Proposition 5:

Learners are capable of developing as practitioners of learning"

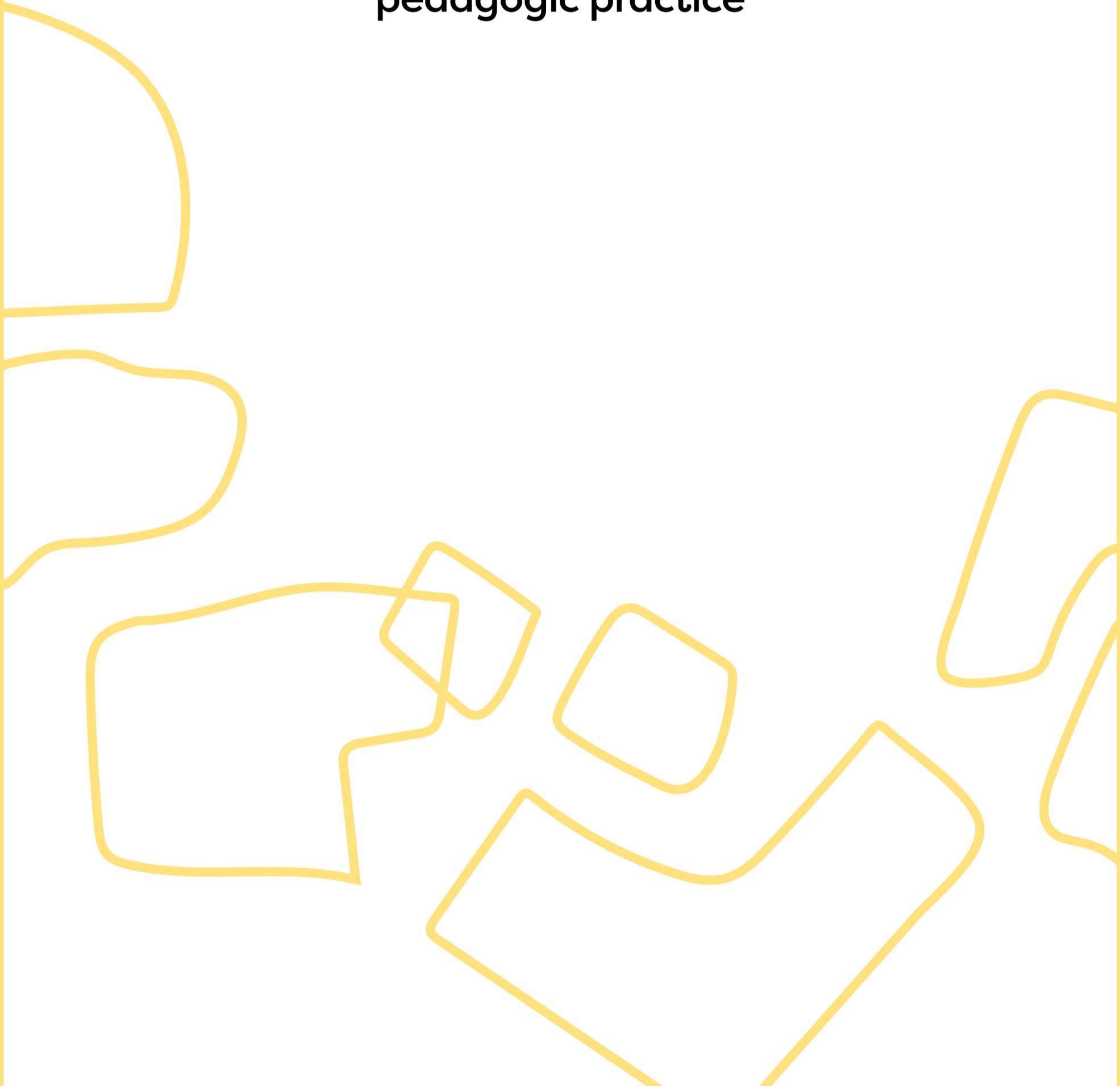
(ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, pp. 5-7).

The stories that we have told up to now well illustrate these five propositions. We included in this discussion teachers, students, school employees and parents with their own ways of working in order to understand questions related to their lives; who learned much in this process, involved themselves in mutual support networks, and were totally able to make decisions by themselves. In fact, they took this very seriously and still had fun in the process.

We begin, then, to suspect that something isn't right, at least for us: if these things already occur and we have so many stories to tell, why do we keep on hearing about lack of performance and lack of seriousness, especially in regard to students? Let's leave this subject for the next chapter.

Chapter 6

**Minimize the burden by integrating
the work for understanding into normal
pedagogic practice**



REFLECTING

Why is it that research activities seem at times to be so unrelated to classroom practices? Why, when we think about research, do we imagine a researcher who comes ‘from outside’, or a student collecting information to deliver to the teacher?

Taking up the issue from the last chapter: sometimes, students are considered unable to make independent decisions about their own learning or to take learning seriously. We have seen that in Exploratory Practice we understand that teachers, students, school employees, and parents as key practitioners, all equally essential, who can learn much (and better!) together. However, when we use the word ‘research’, it seems that this scenario becomes a bit complicated.

REFLECTING

What type of research do you do, or have you done in school? Was it similar to what we have talked about here? No? Why not? In case you have done undergraduate or graduate work, it’s worth thinking about why/how the research in these environments is different from that proposed in the school.

Just as some teachers and coordinators don't think that their students can be responsible for their own development, it's common to see research on classrooms carried out by academics who don't participate in that reality. In some cases, we think that this may be an effect of the processes of 'specialization' in today's world. There seems to be a separation between 'those who teach' and 'those who are qualified to do research'. Well, that's fine, but depending on how research is carried out, it can end up being very far from the reality experienced by practitioners in the school environment

Moreover, there are two other effects of the distance between research and the classroom. The first is that those who live daily in teaching and learning environments may end up thinking that research is only valid if it is carried out using more academic frameworks. The second effect is that it becomes very difficult for teachers or coordinators to begin to think about any plan without, in some way, first carrying out research about their own reality, right?

Long before entering a classroom, teachers have already received incredible quantities of information about 'the best methods to be used', good practices, and all of the prerequisites for the role they are about to assume. Add this to the demand to follow timetables, teach the subject, use the textbook, and fulfil their own expectations in regard to what being in the classroom will be like. That's a lot of pressure! It can even leave us with the impression that there's not enough time to listen to colleagues and to students. And how to make time for research? How, and why, if everything is already programmed beforehand?

Mariana Chagas was teaching her first year in public school, and taking an English Language Specialization course at PUC- Rio when she discovered Exploratory Practice. “What most intrigued me at that time was my need to control everything in the classroom, including the students’ learning. Certainly, this caused me a great deal of frustration”, she says. “My puzzle-questions were three: ‘Why is control so important for me?’, ‘How do my students view control in the classroom?’, and ‘Does my perception about control coincide with that of my students?’”.

Using the 4th grade English language current book at the time, Mariana began a Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activity (PEPA) based upon vocabulary that describes wild animals. “On the book’s page there was a photo of animals boarding Noah’s Ark”, she says. Therefore, after working with the book’s suggestions, that included making animal masks for each student, Mariana asked her students to imagine that the classroom itself was an ark, and asked: “How would your animal act? What would this class be like? In your opinion, what animal would be the representative of the class?”

Since Mariana was coming to the end of her specialization course, the PEPA ended up being the source of her monograph. You may recall that we cited other similar examples on these pages. But with this we’re not saying that Exploratory Practice was conceived in order to facilitate academic research. This may occur, but for us what is key is that the opportunities of collaborative work are generated when research is created and controlled in the classroom, and the understandings are relevant for those who are there.

In the previous chapter we mentioned Dick Allwright as one of the creators of Exploratory Practice. This all began in Rio de Janeiro in the beginning of the 1990s. Invited to present workshops about how to carry out classroom research for teachers in a language institute, Allwright came to the conclusion that what these teachers were doing in the classroom was already inclusive and creative, generating many understandings and joint learning. Rather than proposing an academic solution coming from outside, he appreciated the value of the investigative and collaborative work of these teachers who were over pressured in terms of their performance.

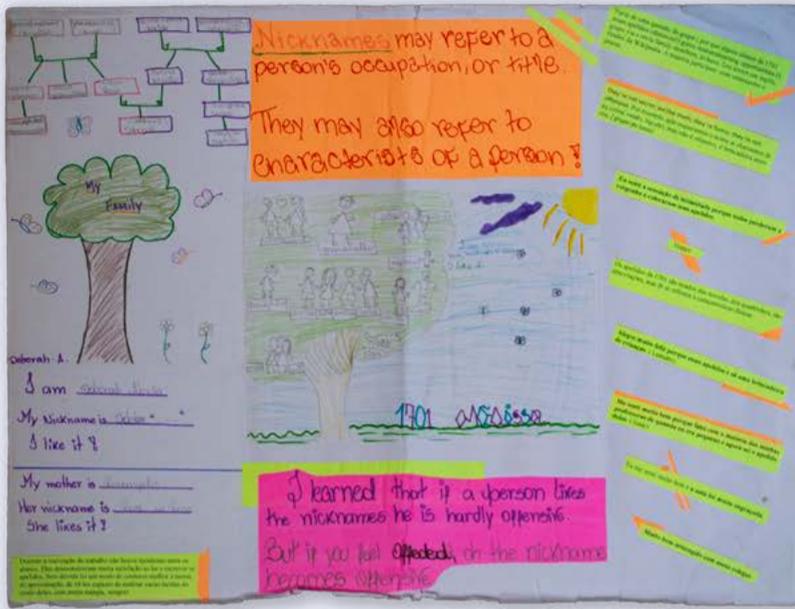
Imagine, for example, that a teacher is going to begin to work with a class that is having its first English lesson. This teacher may plan an activity in pairs in which the students greet each other and ask each others' names. Something very simple, in principle. Nothing that involves much research. The teacher plans to propose phrases such as "Hello! How are you? I'm fine, thanks. And you? What's your name? My name's XXX". Very easy, one would think.

But perhaps there's much that this teacher isn't considering: Who are her students? How much English do they already know? What other ways of asking these questions have they already heard? Why should students who already know each other for years want to know each other's names? Why, in the middle of the day, and already in contact with each other for hours, should they greet each other? What might the students be thinking about this activity and its usefulness? Could it be that students prefer more challenging activities rather than those that are simple and easy?

What if perhaps the teacher had proposed to work with questions about nicknames or about family names of the students and their meanings? She would have involved them with really relevant information for many of them as well as for her.

It's more or less this type of process – this new and curious view directed at everyday activities – that ends up helping us to redefine what we do in the classroom, with the benefit of not exhausting us! After all, we're there in any case. We already have to deal with that content; and we think it important to build collaborative work relations based on listening and on our true interests. In fact, we think that it's this way that we learn.

For this reason, we take teaching activities, deconstruct their structures in order for us to understand what their objectives are, and adapt them to add others. In so doing, we don't deny or abolish the original objectives of the activity, but we resignify them according to our needs, exploring the teaching and learning potential of activities that we are accustomed to. The final effect tends to be quite different than traditionally expected. In regard to that class on nicknames we have an excellent example to show you.



Nicknames

2012

Authors: students of class 1701 of the São Tomás de Aquino Municipal School; Ana Flora Oliveira, Thelma Ribeiro, Carolina Pinho (scholarship students of the Introduction to Teaching Program - PIBID/PUC-Rio)

For further details, see the Translator Note number 4 at the end of the book.

Walewska's students not only discussed the classic introductions in English; they also organized themselves to understand why they had the nicknames they did, what they were used for, and if it was possible to divide them into categories. What they thought was funny, offensive, or pretty didn't always coincide with the opinions of the teacher and of people who attended the poster presentation at the Annual Exploratory Practice Event. Besides this, Walewska learned about useful nicknames related to cases where names were difficult or duplicated in the class.

Normally in an institution of learning, one expects the student to participate in an activity created by someone who believed, as a teacher (it may even be the class teacher), that she or he knew what's best for that student, and expects to see the results of what had to be done. And so the activity is over. The student carries out the task, at times expresses his or her doubts; the teacher, sometimes, clarifies the doubts and nothing more happens. The entire valuable work that occurred for that activity to be created and chosen to be used with those students, and the incredible work of the students to understand what would be done and to explore the various possibilities of responses (correct or incorrect) is not used. It is forgotten and discarded.

In proposing that we use normal activities or those already foreseen, Exploratory Practice helps us to give them another meaning, avoiding that they be automatically proposed by teachers and carried out mechanically by students. Thus, we develop our critical spirit, our autonomy, as agents of our own practice, our independence at work, our confidence in our abilities, as well as working on our attempt to live with the feeling of imbalance between not knowing and knowing.

Mariana Chagas also presented Noah's Ark at the Annual Exploratory Practice Event. She said, "I noticed that many opinions were similar to those of adults and professors. Some students, for example, responded that if the ark were a classroom, it wouldn't be possible for the animals to live in harmony together, and often, this also happens in the classroom. For this reason, the teacher, who is the leader and has the power, makes some students sit in different places."

While she was working to understand the problem of control, Mariana says that she became more professionally confident. "It was very satisfying not being obliged to arrive at a definitive conclusion regarding the work. I had the freedom to achieve various perceptions and to obtain different understandings about the subject. Moreover, it wasn't necessary to reserve time during the class to carry out research. The PEPA allowed me to investigate and to teach at the same time."

And, since some of us are in academia as teachers or students in undergraduate and graduate programs, of course we investigate that context. There are those who work with teacher education – an area that naturally generates innumerable questions – and you might be asking yourself: could it be that this will result in a poster? Our answer is yes.

WORKING TO UNDERSTAND

This poster shows how teachers Inés Miller (PUC- Rio) and Bebel Cunha (CAp/UFRJ) worked with narratives of teachers in a continuing teacher education course. Adapting to the natural desire we have to share our professional/personal stories, the work was organized around the teachers' narratives. Taking the form of a diary, the narratives have entries such as, "Today is Tuesday and I began to observe my steps in the classroom. I felt the same anxiety as when I began to give my first classes. I was being observed by myself."

The teacher continues to describe her week until noting that "At this point, I felt tired of observing and writing the same things. I began to think about the way I have given classes; if I'm tired of writing and of observing the same steps, how do I think my students feel?"

Undoubtedly, when we talk about Exploratory Practice, we are talking about long-term processes, as you have probably noticed. It need not be anything complicated, but the tendency is that one thing leads to another, and that the roles of all of the key developing practitioners are transformed, re-invented within the dynamic of working to understand. Nor do we want it to be any different! If the activity were mechanical, we would hardly be able to wait for it to be over, or we would exhaust ourselves, accumulating lists of things we put off doing. However, when the activities are experienced as desired, not even the questioning of our roles makes them less interesting or lively.

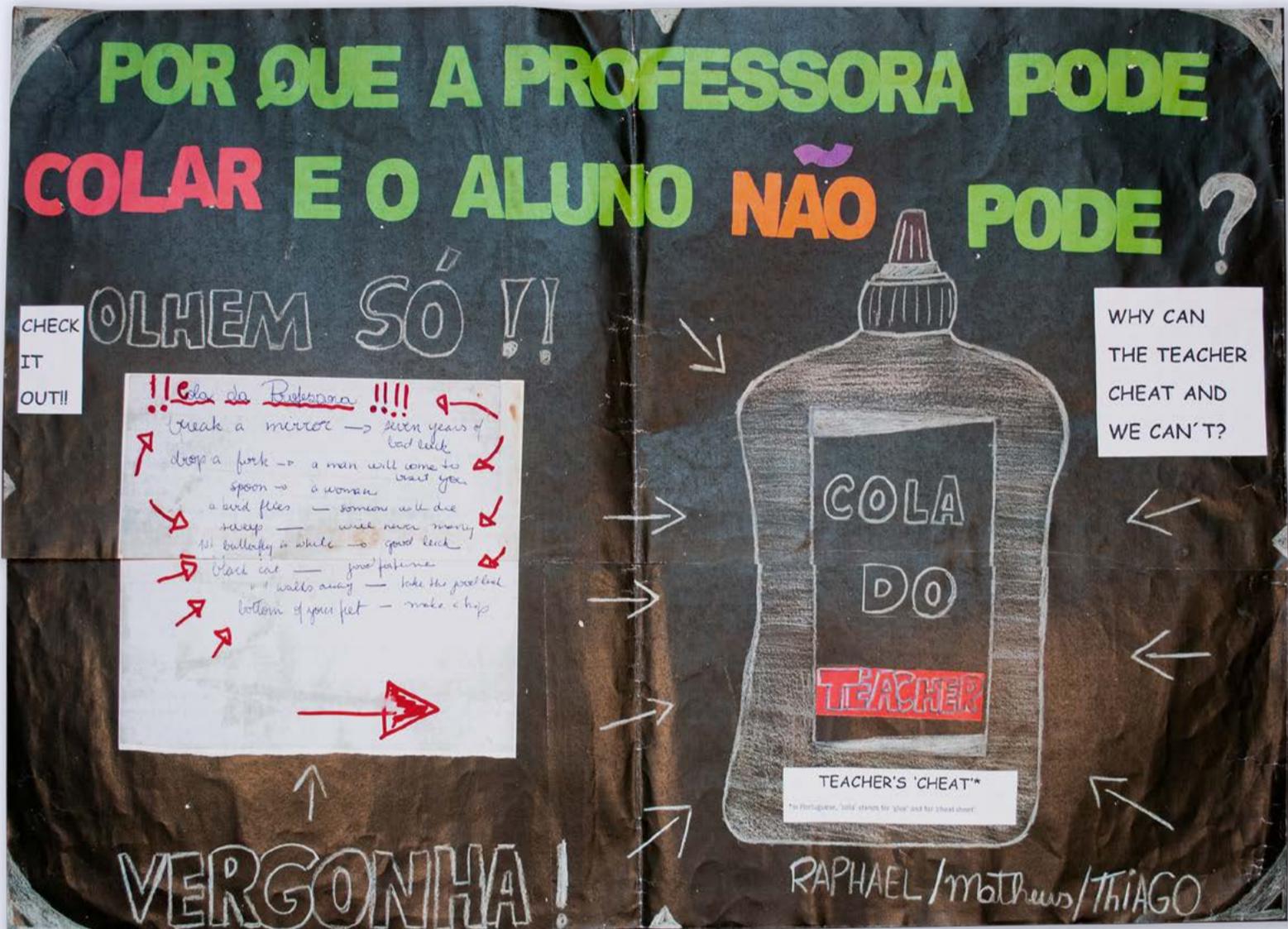
Could it be that teachers also cheat? Raphael, Matheus, and Tiago discovered that this is so! They found a sheet of paper in which Walewska had written down the answers of an exercise proposed to the class. Not that the teacher was concerned about hiding it. She called it “my cheat sheet”. At a given moment, Raphael was upset because “teachers have to know everything”, and concluded that if she could consult a particular answer during class, the students also should be allowed to consult on tests.

Thus there arose the opportunity to investigate some of the many questions of the participants of class 901: Why does a teacher have to know everything? Can a teacher learn along with the students? Is a good student one who doesn't bring a cell phone to school? If cell phones cause problems for students, teachers, and classes, why do some students who don't bring even a pen and pencil to school not forget their cell phones?

A group went to ask teachers in the school, who said: “A teacher is merely someone who facilitates joint knowledge. For this reason, when they teach, teachers learn as well, along with the students.” “The good teacher should always study and stay up to date”. “Cell phones have interesting resources for a good class. Students can bring them as long as they know the right time to use them.”

Another group talked to their schoolmates. For Luisa, “A good teacher always learns something new”. Deryk says that “All teachers should prepare their classes”. “The cell phone helps me”, says Larissa. “Do cell phones disturb people? I disagree. For example, mine, today, hasn't disturbed anybody” said Melissa.

Raphael, Matheus, and Tiago accepted Walewska's proposal to prepare a poster, that ended up being presented by the class at the IV ENPLIRJ, in September, and at the 16th Annual Exploratory Practice Event, in December, under the title, “Why can the teacher cheat and students can't?”.



Why can the teacher cheat and students can't?

2014

Authors: Raphael, Matheus, Thiago,

9th grade students of the São Tomás de Aquino Municipal School

It's possible that you, reader, are surprised with the questions about cell phones that arose out of the reflections of the class in 2014. Cell phones, cheating are recurring themes. The subject of 'cheating' is always current in school: "Whoever doesn't cheat doesn't get out of school", is something that students have claimed for a long time. And this subject was discussed in another poster, in 2004. Another time, another group, the same school, the same question.

POR QUE A GENTE COLA?

QUANDO OS ALUNOS COLAM

o aluno não estuda
Um dia a professora de geografia disse que depois do recreio ela ia dar uma prova. Quando chegou a hora do recreio eu chamei minha amiga para estudar na biblioteca. Ela disse que não precisava que ela já tinha passado toda a matéria num papel. Quando chegou a hora da prova ela foi colar. Não demorou 2 minutos e a professora percebeu, tirou a prova e deu um 1.

Na 4ª série era semana de provas e nesse dia eu não estudei a matéria era matemática. Eu levei uma calculadora e fiquei colando mas qdo eu fui levantar para ir no banheiro a calculadora caiu do meu bolso e a professora me viu e me deu um zero.

Qdo eu era da 5ª série eu não sabia que ia ter prova mas depois a professora falou e deu um tempo para estudar, mas eu só queria ficar brincando. Qdo a professora chegou na sala e separou todos eu pensei em colar para tirar nota boa. Ai eu coloquei as folhas que iam cair na prova na cadeira e sentei e fiz a prova. Respondi tudo. Qdo chegou a hora de levantar a professora estava perto e falou para eu levantar e eu não quis. Ela disse que ia chamar a diretora, então eu levantei e deixei cair a folha. Ela viu e me deu um zero.

NOSSOS ENTENDIMENTOS

- 1- É MUITO IMPORTANTE PASSAR DE ANO: É IMPORTANTE TIRAR NOTA BOA.
- 2- QUANDO O ALUNO ESTUDA, ELE NÃO PRECISA COLAR.
- 3- MUITOS ALUNOS QUEREM SE DAR BEM, MAS ACABAM SE DANDO MAL: O PROFESSOR PEGA, DÁ 1, PÔE PARA FORA DA SALA. MAS ELAS NÃO DESISTEM.
- 4- AS VEZES O ALUNO ESTUDA UMA MATÉRIA E CAI OUTRA COISA NA PROVA.
- 5- A MAIORIA DOS PROFESSORES E ALUNOS COLA OU JÁ COLOU.
- 6- A MAIORIA DOS PROFESSORES E ALUNOS ACHA QUE COLAR É ERRADO.
- 7- OS ALUNOS GOSTAM DE FALAR DAS COLAS, OS PROFESSORES NÃO GOSTAM MUITO, MAS ACABAM CONTANDO AS COLAS QUE FIZERAM.
- 8- TEM ALUNO QUE NÃO COLA. TEM PROFESSOR QUE NUNCA COLOU.
- 9- QUEM COLA SE ENGANSA, SE PREJUDICA PORQUE NÃO APRENDE A MATÉRIA.

SUGESTÕES: OS ALUNOS DEVERIAM SE INTERESSAR MAIS, PRESTAR ATENÇÃO, ESTUDAR... MAS NÃO É FÁCIL!!!

Insegurança: o aluno estuda mas esquece tudo na hora da prova

Era uma vez um garoto que estudou muito em casa mas não confirmou ele chegando na escola ele esqueceu tudo e acabou colando e a professora viu ele colando e tirou a prova dele e ele foi expulso da sala de aula.

Algum tempo atrás minha prof de geografia pediu que eu decorasse alguns estados eu até consegui decorar a maioria mas falei para três e eu escrevi o nome dos estados na minha mão por falta de segurança e me dei bem.

Era uma vez um aluno que com medo de não passar e da mãe dele bater nele, colou e pensou que ia tirar nota boa. Mas qdo ele abriu a prova tinha errado tudo e nunca mais colou.

a prova é difícil

No dia 30/06/04 eu e o meu amigo estávamos fazendo o trabalho de matemática e surgiu uma questão que a gente não sabia e aí eu e ela pedimos cola aos garotos que estavam atrás da gente e eles deram.

Era uma vez meu amigo estava fazendo uma prova muito difícil aí ele começou a pedir cola

o aluno quer se dar bem

Uma vez eu entrei na sala de aula com a cola na mão e então a professora mandou eu tirar o bone. Ai eu hotei em cima da mesa e colou.

Um dia na prova de matemática eu e a minha amiga pedimos cola e tiramos MB

O ano passado eu fiz duas colas. Tinha cola no cabelo, na calça, no casaco, na mão, no bolso, no chão, no parede, mas contou do aluno da frente.

QUEM COLA NAS OUTRAS TURMAS

A maioria cola
1 aluno diz que é legal colar porque só tira nota boa
1 acha melhor colar do que ficar reprovado

OS PROFESSORES

A maioria já colou na escola ou na universidade
1 professora nunca colou porque estudava, mas dava cola.

NA 702

A maioria cola
2 alunos só colam de vez em quando
1 não cola na prova de inglês
1 não cola porque estuda

Os truques mais comuns pelas ruas

é fora da escola?

'Gato' em cano roubava água destinada a Búzios
Ligação clandestina desviava 270 mil litros por mês para cerca de 40 casas em Cabo Frio

Why do we cheat?

CHEAT

Cheat /tʃiːt/ (V) /tʃiːt/ to act in a way that is dishonest, or to write (someone) believe something that is not true in order to get something for yourself. The sentence computers were found to be dishonest computers. (Cambridge Dictionary of American English, Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Cheat /tʃiːt/ /s/ to behave in a dishonest way in order to get what you want. Anyone caught cheating will be immediately disqualified from the exam. She cheated in the test by copying from the boy in front. (Cambridge International Dictionary of English, Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Colar. V.t.d. 1. unir, pegar com cola 2- juntar cola a, para dar consistência 3- clarear (vitólio) com cola 4- Brta. Clr. copiar clandestinamente num exame escrito, filar. Não passou na prova de matemática sem colar. (Dicionário Aurélio da Língua Portuguesa: 2ª edição, Editora Nova Fronteira, 1984).

Scenarios of Academic Dishonesty

CREATING INCIDENT 1
Students arrive at an imaginary cheating incident. Note the special items and equipment they used to describe the situation.

Cheating Leads to Expulsion
#Buenos Cheaters/Expulsion from Thailand
Angela's Testatrix from Brazil

A student was trying to send a piece of paper to another student about the teacher's secret answer and saw them. Even though they had never gotten caught cheating before, they were used to the principal's office, and knew their secret wasn't safe.

Textos lidos na 702

ESCOLA MUNICIPAL STO TOMÁS DE AQUINO

Alunos e professora buscando entender a vida na sala de aula

Ana Raquel Lemos da Silva
Carlos Magno Dias dos Santos
Daniela Lemos da Silva
Patricia Alves do Carmo
Tihago dos Santos Simões
Walewska Gomes Braga

Leia mais sobre a cola

O aluno colou? É hora de discutir avaliação. E regras
Raquel Ribeiro, Revista Nova Escola, junho / julho de 2004:46 - 49.
Tecnologia a serviço da cola
Fernando Duarte, Megazine, 14 de setembro de 2004:12

In defense of cheating
<http://ind.org>
Scenarios of academic dishonesty
Topics on line magazine
<http://www.topics.mag.com>

Leia mais sobre prática exploratória

Web site:
<http://www.fine.lanccs.ac.uk/groups/EPCentre/epcentre.htm>
blog:
<http://platicaxploratoria.zip.net>
e-mail
epcentreio@hotmail.com

Why do people cheat? 2004

Authors: Ana Raquel Lemos da Silva, Carlos Magno Dias dos Santos. Daniela Lemos da Silva, Patricia Alves do Carmo, Tihago Santos Simões, Walewska Gomes Braga; São Tomás de Aquino Municipal School

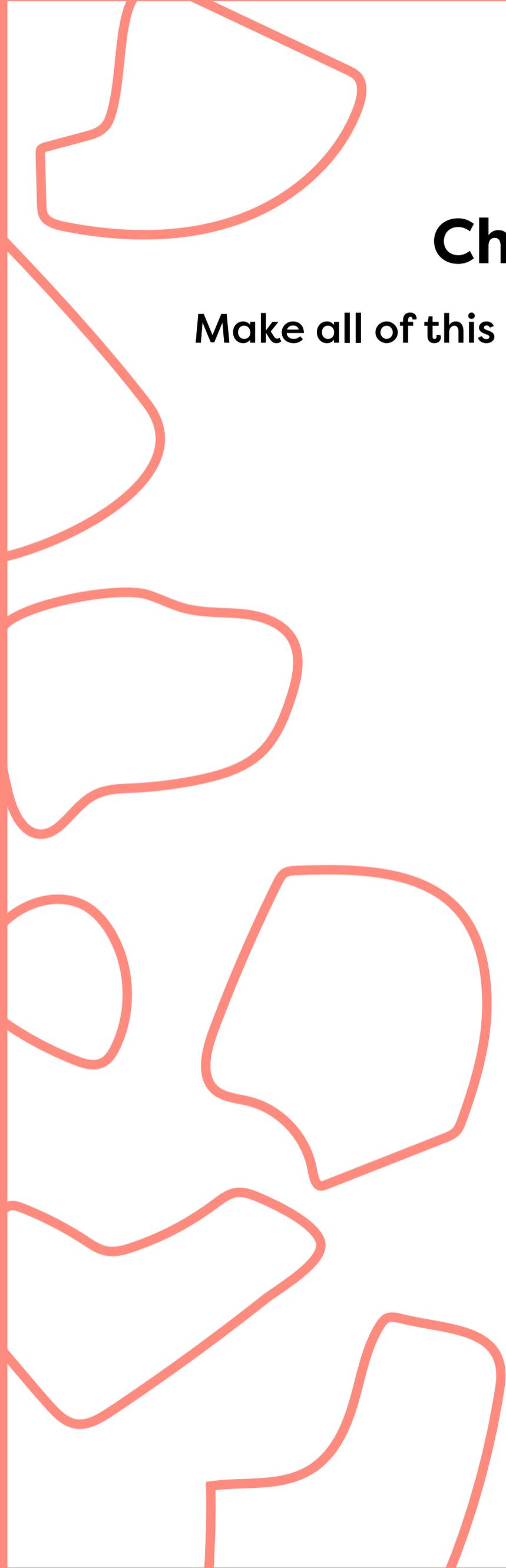
For further details, see the Translator Note number 5 at the end of the book.

For the poster *Why do People Cheat?* the students carried out research with schoolmates and teachers. Since they often attended Exploratory Practice Group meetings at PUC-Rio, they also interviewed the Exploratory Practice practitioners. They discovered entertaining things: cheating notes on desks, on the wall, on the ceiling (!), morning group class cheat notes to help the afternoon class. They even discovered a teacher who had never cheated. They heard and told about anxieties about passing, the fear of low grades, nervousness at testing time. And they went beyond this. A newspaper report of the time addressed daily transgressions.

But it isn't possible to construct this work in a day, which leads us to the last principle, about which we comment in the next chapter. From what we have been able to perceive, in practice, no principle is more important than any other, and all principles complement each other so that at times, one leads to another, more or less as we've tried to do in this book.

OUR UNDERSTANDINGS

When we re-invent the mechanical and obligatory activities that everyone (teachers, students, and employees) has to carry out in educational institutions, we become researchers of our own practice. We do this in a way that doesn't tire us and can be quite fun – besides gaining time, since we learn to collaborate.

The left side of the page features several overlapping, hand-drawn red outlines of irregular shapes, resembling abstract figures or organic forms. These shapes are positioned against a white background and extend from the left edge towards the center.

Chapter 7

Make all of this a continuous enterprise

This is going to be our last chapter here, and therefore we have decided to begin it in a way different from the others. We still have a final commentary but, at least in this book, it will be our last conversation about a principle.

Since we hope that this kind of exchange continues beyond the limits of these pages, we want to invite you to an experience that we like very much when we get together. At this point of the ‘exploratory championship’ we would like to imagine that we have by now constructed a certain continuity – along with so many stories, talks, and ideas– in this conversation with you.

And since sustainability is the subject of this chapter, let’s take the opportunity to try to make things a bit more interactive. And the activity is quite simple: rather than us saying what we think about a poster, or talk about a related story of a Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activity (PEPA), let’s merely present it here and invite you to work to understand it.

Let’s go to the poster, then! It’s called What do adolescents have in their heads? / Our Brain.

REFLECTING

What comes into your mind observing this poster? Does it awaken your curiosity? Why? And why do you think it was done in this way? Could it be that something similar could be done in the classrooms in which you participate or have participated? Would you like to do something like this? Would it change anything?

What did you understand?

And now? Did you like the experience? We hope so! In case you're curious in regard to Our Brain, keep calm. Very soon we'll tell the story behind this poster. We only want to take advantage of this moment in order to make the link between this activity of analysing a poster and the question of sustainability. During these thirty years, we have heard many stories about what Exploratory Practice means, and we have noted some things in common among them. It seems that we carry on with our exploratory activities because of the freedom and autonomy that we feel being explorers in the classroom. We have also found this kind of environment at the meetings and events of the Exploratory Practice Group of Rio de Janeiro, and this stands the test of time because, after all, we want to return!

REFLECTING

Why do so many fine education projects end early? Why do we have so many ideas and produce so much interesting content in the classroom, but their validity or utility ends as soon as we go out the door (or as soon as the agreed upon time period ends)?

In general, we note that projects that use new methodologies and approaches, that implement new kinds of teaching materials, or that offer greater participation to students have a limited time frame, either because they are associated with some outside organization (which limits calendars and budgets) or because they don't fit into the school year plan.

But the questions that arise when we begin any collaborative work don't end just because the time limit (or the budget) ends. In fact, they never end, and we think it's incredible that this is so! The more people who become involved with a question, the more possibilities of understanding and joint work are created. Just as with the brief experience that we undertook here with *What do adolescents have in their heads?/Our Brain*, we believe that each of the posters, small notes, presentations, and projects to which we dedicated time in class can have much to tell us, if given the opportunity.

In school, we often hear phrases such as: "The teacher didn't even look properly at my work!"; "I made a real effort to correct it and the student just dropped the essay there!"; "We come in to clean up the room and find this pile of exercises thrown on the floor!" It's painful to see so much effort turned out to be disposable. But when we ask the reason for this we go back to the subject of interest, of what awakens our curiosity and of the autonomy that we seek in order to investigate these challenging questions.

REFLECTING

Have you ever thrown away work done in school after having received a confirmation that it has been seen, a correction, or after a brief presentation? Have you ever thought that you might have done more with it, but didn't have time? Have you regretted not giving more attention to some work that demanded a great deal of your effort?

That's why we work to understand the quality of life in the classroom, involving everyone in this process, and seeking to make this work intentionally directed at the union of all and mutual development. We recreate our daily activities by means of questions that truly interest us, so that this work doesn't become something 'extra', 'heavy', or 'obligatory'. And with this we truly wish to return, to continue investigating, conversing, constructing our autonomous way of understanding what we are doing – such as the story of What do adolescents have in their heads?/Our Brain also shows.

EXPLORATORY EXPERIENCES

The context of What do adolescents have in their heads?/Our Brain is that of working with an accelerated class (a project whose objective is to correct gaps between students' age and their grade level, due to grade repetition and absenteeism) at the São Tomás de Aquino School, where teacher Walewska works. This was during the time of the attack at the Professor Raul Brasil State School, when adolescents fired weapons at classmates and employees. Walewska organized a memorial with her 9th grade class, and in one of the English classes of the accelerated group she noted that one of the students was aggressive with her. She then spoke with Silvane, the lead teacher of the class, who confirmed the instability of the group. "One day everything was fine, and on the other, everything was confused, difficult, lots of fighting, little work", Walewska recalls.

But the process that led them to this point of drawing the brains didn't happen all of a sudden. Besides all of the reflection involved (that included the prior activity carried out in the 9th grade class), there was also the attempt to work on the question. "I chose a text about the brains of adolescents, that focused on this instability, on moods, on dangerous oscillations", says Walewska. "It was a text from the internet that I edited, adapted, brought to the class, and from them, nothing. We read it together, and they weren't interested. And the class (one of two periods!) was looong... What to do?", she recalls.

In case this had been, for example, an external project with pre-defined time limits and budget to treat questions of non-violence in schools, it would have been difficult to arrive at the understandings (and involvement!) that the group achieved. Of course, they might have adapted the opportunity given by a project such as this, re-inventing their activities, as we often do with our PEPAs. But the main thing that ended up guaranteeing continuity in this case was the focus on questions interesting to them, with autonomy and flexibility to experiment with ways of investigating them. And also because *What do adolescents have in their heads?/Our Brain* also included the participation of the 'Pibids' involved with Exploratory Practice, as we saw before, in a much longer process.

WORKING TO UNDERSTAND

The idea of drawing brains originated in a conversation between Walewska and the 'Pibids' working on that day. "And the students were enthused", she says. "Then we asked them to work in groups, to make one brain, together, with similarities, differences, in order to consider: "What would it be like?" "What would it have?" We had string and red paper. And glue. And they went to work, using creativity and skill, because gluing string isn't easy! We asked them to think about the proportions of each word used. And their math entered: calculating here; calculating there. It couldn't be more than 100%. An adventure. Another intriguing thing was that they used words in English. Some they knew; others they searched in Google. They asked. It made sense, and they learned a great deal.", Walewska says.

It's through this willingness to hear, to be flexible, and to involve everyone that the continuity of work and of relations are constructed. In the case of this poster, for example, Walewska highlights two situations that caught her attention. "One student refused to do the work and sat sullenly in a corner. I went to talk to her. Pregnant, little by little she spoke about this moment that is so very difficult for an adolescent. Much anger, fear, and love for the baby. I suggested that she work alone and draw her brain and that of the baby. Her work was beautiful: brains linked by a chord of love. It was really touching...", she recalls.

The second situation was that of a group that attributed to God 50% of importance in the observed classification in the poster. "I went to nudge them and... no sex? How come?" says Walewska. "Ah, but I saw the format of the work and joked: 'the brain is square. I get it' Later, they added sex. They were embarrassed by my presence. It was funny and we laughed a lot", she says. She also comments that there was a student in this group who initiated all of that reflection, actively participating in the work – the same student who had been aggressive with her.

It's good to remember that not all movements of research and continuity in working to understand stem from the questions of teachers and coordinators. At times, students become interested through what their teachers say and combine their questions with them. But in some cases, students themselves mobilize in order to understand a particular aspect of the quality of life in their practices, as in the next poster that we present here.



Is satisfactory excellent?

2002

Authors: 8th grade students of Colégio Don Quixote

REFLECTING

Why (and how) do we use the concepts of excellent, good, satisfactory, and poor in our daily lives? Do they apply only to school?

In the case of the poster *Is satisfactory excellent?*, it all began with a question of a group of 8th grade students at Colégio Don Quixote. They were very interested in knowing about the evaluation concepts used in the classroom. It was a common practice for students to evaluate their presentations, awarding them classifications such as those in our question, given that the school didn't use number or letter grades. Besides this, they made comments about the presentation. However, as Bebel tells us, some members of the class began to think it would be interesting to take a closer look at the way these evaluations were made.

WORKING TO UNDERSTAND

The students noted that “the comments that were made didn't coincide with the classifications” Bebel says. “The comments pointed toward problems of presentation, in the poster or in any other work presented by the groups, but on the other hand, the classifications were good”, she says. In order to understand this process, the students not only collected and reflected upon these comments; they also interviewed their authors, which was the origin of the structure of the final poster: original comments and reflections on the comment process itself.

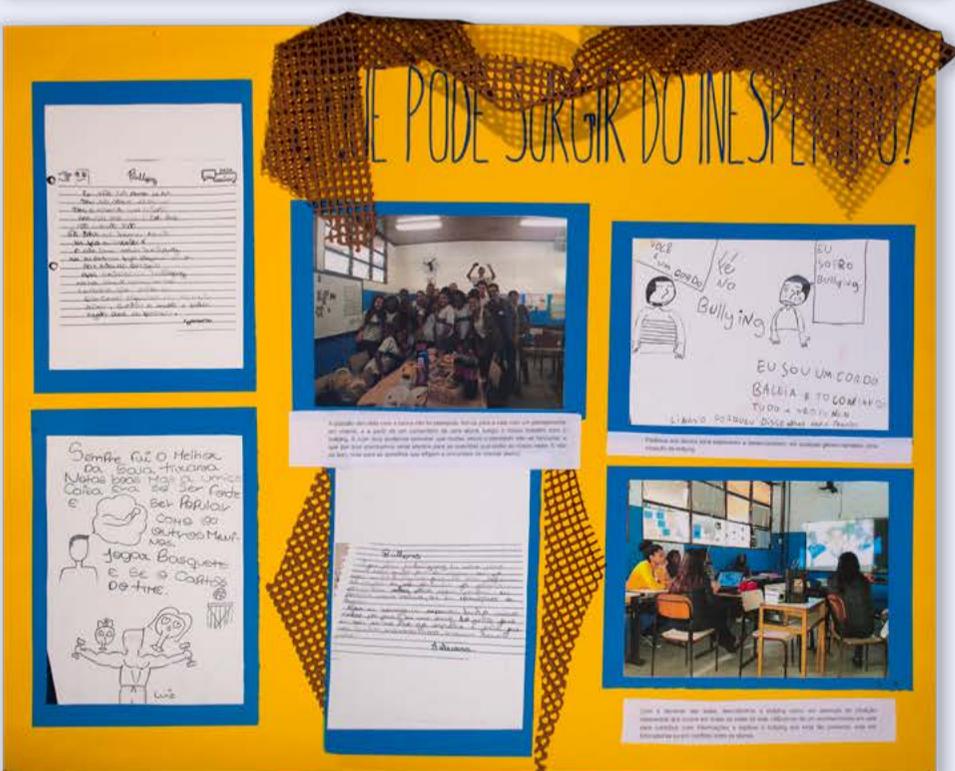
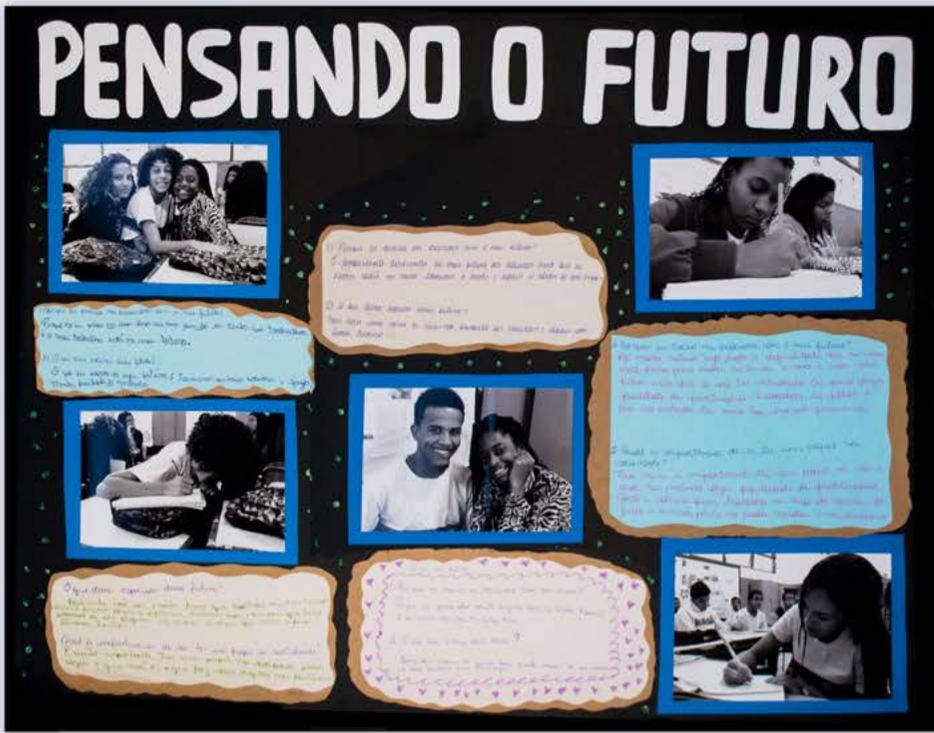
Making sure that a work is continuous has more to do with wanting to understand than with wanting to reach a conclusion. If we are talking about life, the idea is to work while we're in a situation to do so. Perhaps, at this point, our initial comment about not focusing on solutions begins to make more sense. In the case we just treated, the students interviewed their classmates because they were indeed interested in knowing how those comments were generated. This could have easily been transformed into an activity to remake all of the classifications, or even a series of accusations about who knows how and who doesn't know how to evaluate.

But the very process of working on what we do, with autonomy and creativity, tends to produce sufficient energy so that nobody wants the work to die in the home stretch. "When the students went to present at PUC-Rio, at the Annual Exploratory Practice Event," says Bebel, "they discovered that it was difficult to differentiate between the comments on the work and comments on the comments. So, they placed a mark – a small triangle, a star, or something similar – in order to easily show these relations. I found this to be very interesting, very Socratic, very proactive, and it shows how they were 'with it', really wanting to show their work because they saw that they needed to explain those relations to their audience."

There are many cases, and unfortunately, not all of them can be presented in this book. However, all have in common constructions of various types of relations – of the practitioner with his or her question, of the practitioner with the questions of others, of the practitioners among themselves, among others – and all of these connections are related to the search for understanding for the autonomy to do so. It's these connections, that begin with curiosity taken seriously, that make the work gain sustainability. For this reason we need to reject the posture of being the owners of all knowledge that, in spite of being associated with the role of teachers, can be found in diverse situations. The very expression 'owner of all knowledge' is a bit strange, because teachers, in general, don't produce the knowledge that they share (and at times even they need to cheat!).

As Walewska says, “not knowing becomes knowing through a meeting, through reflection, through understanding. It isn’t there ready-made. It flourishes with the other. This is a proposal of Exploratory Practice.” In educational institutions, however, we often find people who are used to following ready-made projects, implanted according to fads dictated through the orientation of education administrators committed to products, to success. We encounter teachers who see themselves merely as one who asks questions and gives answers, and we see students who seem to accept this, meanwhile learning that their role is to fit in and keep quiet.

Focus on the process, then, and not on the product. As we have seen, the ‘Pibids’ start to work with their questions, in Exploratory Practice, during their initial teacher education. They participate in collaborative planning with teachers and students. They create PEPA’s for the classrooms they work with, and transform the very process of thinking about the future into a PEPA. Take a look!



Thinking About the Future

2017
 Authors: Arthur Barbosa, Paulo Eduardo Rangel, Nathalya da Silva Turso, students of the 8001

Acceleration class of São Tomás de Aquino Municipal School; Anna Carolina Jardim Gerbasi, Clara dos Anjos, Rosenilde Oliveira Costa e Silva, Lunna Pirozzi, Luiza Morais, Izidoro da Silva, Thauany Vigar, Joana Soares Gomes and Luciana Torres, future teachers enrolled in the government-funded Teaching Initiation Program (PIBID/PUC-Rio); Professor Alexandre de Oliveira, teacher participating in the Teaching Initiation Program (PIBID/PUC-Rio)

For further details, see the Translator Note number 6 at the end of the book.

This series of posters was produced with 9th grade students of the São Tomás de Aquino School, and presented at the Inter-institutional Meeting of the government-funded Teaching Initiation Program (PIBID/PUC-Rio). Based on the question “Why do I have to think about my future?”, the ‘Pibids’ sought to understand what the relation was of students with their plans that, at first, seemed so different from what the trainees themselves felt. From discussions about disinterest with studies or expectations of obtaining a job, a work emerged with texts and an unplanned turn-around – that led them to work on the theme of “bullying”.

The ‘Pibids’ discovered expectations such as moving up in life, having a better life than those of their parents, or only wanting to “be a common person”, in the words of student Paulo, because “it’s you who constructs your story”. Nathalya, another student, says that, “In fact, it isn’t: ‘what should I expect from the future?’ I think we don’t have to expect anything, but rather do something for the future”. These are strong words, from people fully able to make decisions regarding their own learning, and perhaps this should be less surprising than it usually is.

Moreover, the network of affect that is built around these PEPAs, posters and creative learning meetings, is more extensive than we are able to imagine. Believe us, we’ve already tried! It’s like the poem “Quadrille”, in which Drummond says that “John loved Teresa who loved Raimundo who loved Maria...” Here, we’re going to take this as our inspiration: Walewska taught Ana Raquel who created various posters and attended Sabine’s thesis presentation who was a student of Adriana Pucci and supervised by Inés who taught Mariana Chagas and Ruan as well as Bebel who... Certainly, there’s much love involved – of the type that Paulo Freire said was necessary in the transgressive educational process.

“We are always connected; thus a community” says Walewska. “My students have been my partners for years. For the last twenty years, at least. Of course, a group that always renews itself... But the world turns, time passes, Facebook appears that brings former students. Already adults, heads of families. The other day, I received an invitation for the first birthday of the son of two former students. They participated actively in the events, with Ana Raquel and her niece. So, fifteen years later the couple remembers the trips to PUC, the posters, the group. Lives that go on, affection that remains. I insisted on going to the party, and there was lots of affection the whole time... It seems to me that this relation was built by Exploratory Practice. It’s been around for some time, sustains itself, and does so much good!”

OUR UNDERSTANDINGS

Seeing to it that the work to understand is continuous and not an occasional activity within a specific project means truly wishing to work to understand what we do, the life that we live in the classroom (and in other contexts) every day. This is fun, involving – it seems to indicate that learning is collaborative, possible, and endless.

Why don't we talk some more?

So, did you like our chat? We very much want to hear your understandings about our journey in the world of the principles and stories of Exploratory Practice. And it's not hard to find us. You can write to epcenterio@gmail.com or look for us on Facebook ([@praticaexploratoria](https://www.facebook.com/@praticaexploratoria)).

Besides this, our meetings are open to the participation of all. They usually take place once per month at PUC-Rio, always on Friday afternoons. The Annual Exploratory Practice Events also take place there – normally between November and December, during which practitioners involved with their questions can share the development of their exploratory work.

Moreover, there are various other opportunities to attend the presentations of posters, participate in exploratory conversations, or read about what we do. In this regard, you can receive information by contacting us by e-mail and subscribing to our newsletter. And Exploratory Practice doesn't have an owner: you may have become inspired by our stories here and decide to begin to test the waters alone; or better, with your students, teachers, and colleagues, whatever your situation may be.

If we stop to really think about this, the work is continuous because the understandings are as well: they constantly renew, transform, and update themselves. So, feel free to try them out! But we would love to hear about your experiences. After all, as you already know, it's this collective process that nourishes us and inspires us to carry on.

The Exploratory Practice Group of Rio de Janeiro

Translator notes

Note n° 1

In the research, students prepared a small questionnaire for the teachers in which they asked: What do you consider to be teaching/learning materials; What teaching/learning materials do you use with your students?; How do you assess, from 0 to 10, your teaching/learning materials?; How do you classify your degree of satisfaction with the materials?; What is lacking? Is it possible to add to them?; In general, what do your students think of the materials?

A questionnaire was also prepared for the students, with the following questions: What teaching/learning materials do you bring to class?; Think about your materials in English (in the book and in the handouts). What grade would you give to the course book?; What do you like about the course book?; What don't you like?; What other teaching/learning materials do you use in the English classes? Assess these activities, giving grades from 1 to 10.

Note n° 2

Some of the conclusions of the students were:

- “When I hit my sister, she tells my mother and I suffer more than she does. I’m going to try to stop fighting with my sister because fighting only causes me problems.”

- “Not to fight, but to play. We all fight and we always end up talking to each other and saying we’re sorry.”

- “It starts with a little fight and becomes a big one, ending up by trading blows and swearing at each other.”

- “I fight because I don’t like it when they mess with my things. I don’t like them to bother me when I’m doing my homework, not even when they turn on the radio loudly when I’m sleeping...”

- “Many people mess with others. They show off and swear, and the other person doesn’t like it and does the same with others.”

- “Because everybody has a way of acting. Some are weak, others are strong. The fighting of cats and dogs is almost the same thing as our fights. They fight just for a piece of meat. We fight for various reasons; teasing, prejudice. Fighting can even end up with someone dying.”

Note nº 3

In the research, Ana Raquel interviewed 11 colleagues, and some said that, in order to study math in the classroom, they copy and do the exercises and at home they re-do and read the exercises. They also say that they like to work with colleagues and that the easiest subjects to get good grades in are science, physical education, and art – you just have to like it and read a little.

When Tihago interviewed 5 teachers (math, science, geography, history, English and art) they said that they were all good students in the 7th grade, but that they had difficulties in some subjects. They added that they improved by reading, re-doing exercises, making summaries of questionnaires, studying every day, asking teachers and friends when in doubt. They commented that some teachers were hard to get along with, others didn't explain things well, and that, in general, all of them gave lots of homework.

Ana and Tihago discovered that: math worries students of the school, many fail the course, and that their grades aren't good either in school or in the university. They explained that it's easier to earn a good grade when you like the subject, and that it's good to work together with classmates because one person helps the other, and so everyone ends up learning. Some teachers recalled that in the past one studied more, while others said that things haven't changed much.

Reflecting about doing the research, Ana Raquel said "it was easy to do the interviews, but some people didn't want to answer. I learned with my colleagues that, liking it or not, studying is and always will be important for our future and for the future of our Brazil". Tihago said, "I liked to interview the teachers. Almost all of them were friendly. I'm going to be nervous (I always am) when I present a poster."

Note n° 4

The group from class 1701 (seventh grade), when working with vocabulary related to the family, was invited to share and reflect about their nicknames at home and in school. This activity helped the teacher and student teachers to understand how students treated each other, and the feelings involved in the interpersonal relations of the students. Based on this work, the nicknames were grouped by the students into the following categories: funny (for example: skeleton, owl, sausage, problematic, Casper); offensive (for example: dragon, wolf-man, unwashed, thick-skinned cockroach, sardine can); cute (for example: jaguar, little drop, little dolphin, dry leaf). Some of the thoughts about this reflection were:

- “It gave me a feeling of intimacy because everybody lost their shyness and told each other about their nicknames.”
- “The nicknames of 1701 were taken from soap operas, from comic books. They are abbreviations, but also refer to physical traits.”
- “I felt really good because I talked to most of my teachers about when I was small and now I know their nicknames.”

Note n° 5

In the poster “Why do we cheat?” the group reflected about the times when students cheat. Among the various stories, we highlight:

- “When I was in the 5th grade I didn’t know there was going to be a test, but later the teacher said so and gave us time to study, but I only wanted to keep on playing. When the teacher arrived in the classroom and separated everybody, I thought about cheating in order to earn a good grade. So, I put the pages that were to appear on the test on my chair and took the test. I answered all the questions. When it was time to get up, the teacher was nearby and told me to stand up and I didn’t want to. She said she was going to call the principal, so I got up and the pages fell on the floor. She saw it and gave me a zero.”

- “Once upon a time, there was a student who, being afraid of not passing and his mother punishing him, cheated and thought he would earn a good grade. But when he looked at the test, he had got everything wrong and never again cheated.”

- “Last year I cheated so much. I stuck cheat sheets in my hair, my pants, my jacket, my socks, my pocket, on the floor, on the wall, on the back of the student in front of me.”

Some understandings achieved were:

- “When you study, you don’t have to cheat.”

- “Many students want to end up well, but end up badly: the teacher sees them, ejects them from class, but they don’t give up.”

- “Sometimes a student studies a subject and other things are on the test.”

- “Most teachers and students cheat or have cheated.”

- “Most teachers and students think that cheating is wrong.”

The students did research in order to know who cheats and concluded that:

- In their class (702), the majority cheat, two students only cheat infrequently, one cheats on English tests, and one doesn’t cheat because she studies.

- In the other classes, the majority cheat. One student says it’s OK to cheat because he gets only good grades and thinks it’s better to cheat than to be failed.

When asked if cheating exists outside of school, they read news reports about the most common street tricks. For example, when people alter motorcycle and car license plates in order to not receive fines, or when covert connections are made from local water mains.

Note nº 6

In this poster, thinking about the future, the group of students and student teachers said:

- “I hope to find a path to follow that will make my parents proud and especially the teachers that helped me”. (Jailciane)
- “For me, to have a role in society is very good and one day, who knows, to leave the slum.” (Rafael)
- “For me, the importance of having a role in society still isn’t totally clear. I don’t know what I want to be in life. I only want to be a regular person, we’re all human. Humans can become irritated, can get stressed out, can fall in love, can care about others, but all of this depends on the role in society, and you construct your own story.” (Paulo)
- “In fact, it isn’t: ‘what should I expect from the future?’ I think we don’t have to expect anything, but rather do something for the future. I believe that studying may be the best for your future. Not only studying, but taking courses, having a job, even if it’s temporary.” (Nathalya)
- “I hope that my life is better than the one I have today and not the same life as my parents’.” (Fabiana)
- “I don’t want to be a nobody, I want to study a lot, so that I can move up in life.” (Vinicius)
- “Because school is the best place to decide what I want.” (Yasmin)

For the third part of the poster (What can arise from the unexpected!), students explored and developed, in different narrative styles, various bullying situations they had experienced.

In regard to bullying, the group of student teachers said the following: “The issue discussed with the group hadn’t been planned. We went to the classroom with a plan in mind, and our work with bullying arose from a student’s comment. From this, we could see that often, whatever is planned might not work, and for this reason we need to pay attention to the issues around us. And not only this, but to issues that afflict and surround our students.”

