

The role of the ‘guiding educator’ in the student group for citizen training-action¹

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ABSTRACT. The Student organization is fundamental to the establishment of the educational community, democratic management, and the exercise of values and principles that strengthen the culture of rights. One way of having the student organization is the association or guild, ensured by the legislation since 1985. However, it is necessary that this instance of participation is fully assumed by the students. In the city of São Paulo, an ordinance standardizes its existence and establishes that the role of the Student Union advisor should be occupied by an adult chosen by the students. In this article, we seek to analyze the mediation processes in a teacher’s narrative about her role as an advisor with students from the Municipal Elementary Education School of the Centro Educacional Unificado Butantã, which was engaged in building a union.

The methodological strategies used were observation and yarning circle with semi-structured questions analyzed from Social Pedagogy theoretical frameworks. It is possible to observe the contradictions and mediation strategies involved in exercising the role of the guiding teacher and their impact on promoting youth protagonism and autonomy in the students of the guild.

Keywords: Youth protagonism. Social Pedagogy. Mediation. Student Union/Guild.

Introduction

As it has been already indicated in its title, this article is aimed at investigating the behavior of students and educators about the socio-educational, socio-cultural and socio-political proposals of Centro Educacional

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Unificado Butantã (CEU Butantã), in their daily lives, within their architectural project, and in the reality of the neighborhood in which they are inserted as "appropriation of social spaces". The concept of "appropriation of social spaces" adopted here, inspired by Leontiev (1978), comprises the process by which children and adolescents "transform the seemingly lifeless socio-spatial world into their individual and personal world" (scenario of experiences, Mackpesquisa, p. 10, 2020).

The investigation that we propose to present here refers specifically to actors from one of the school units that make the CEU Butantã, the Municipal Elementary School (EMEF), with special attention to the preparatory meetings for the creation of the Student Union.

The choice of the Student Union as investigation *locus* is due to the important role that this entity can play for students, as a space for action/appropriation in/of the school institution, considering the socio-political domain.

The socio-political domain holds as areas of knowledge the social and political processes expressed, for example, in the form of participation, protagonism, associativism, cooperativism, entrepreneurship, income generation, and social management. It aims to develop skills and competencies to qualify participation in the social, political, and economic life of the community where the subject is inserted or of the spaces where the person wants to be as a subject. Due to its characteristics, the sociopolitical intervention has, as privileged loci, student unions, associations of parents and masters (APM), school councils, residents' associations, civil rights councils, social mobilizations, non-governmental organizations, unions, political parties, public and social politics. (Silva; Souza Neto; Moura, 2009, p. 285).

It is worth observing that student unions, as a form of organization for high school students, were banned during the long period of the military regime that Brazil was subjected to since the Civic-Military Coup of March 31st, 1964, and only in 1985, during the political reopening process, student unions were legally guaranteed.

In 1988, with the promulgation of the Federal Constitution known as the "Citizen Constitution", a process of reconstructing the country's democratic culture was established, at least within the scope of the legislation. Popular participation in public spaces starts the process of being recognized through the proposition of democratic management. In school units this form of management, which brings us one of its principles the active participation of educators, students, and their families comes into force from 1996, with the Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação (Law of Directives and Basis of Education - LDB) nº 9.394:

Art. 14. The education systems will define the standards for the democratic management of public education in basic education, according to their peculiarities and according to the following principles: I - participation of education professionals in the elaboration of the school pedagogical project; II - participation of the school and local communities in school councils or equivalent. (Brazil, 1996, p. 06)

As we can see in article 14 above, a strategic document for the establishment of a democratic culture in all environments, activities, and daily proposals of the school, is the Pedagogical Political Project (PPP), which, according to Libâneo (2001), represents the organization and intentionality of each school unit. In addition to the transcription of laws, ordinances, and regulations, the PPP can express a commitment established collectively, as long as it is conceived in a participatory way:

As a participatory decision-making process, the political-pedagogical project seeks to establish a form of pedagogical work organization that unveils conflicts and contradictions, seeks to eliminate competitive, corporate and authoritarian relations, breaking with the routine of personal and rationalized command of bureaucracy and allowing horizontal relationships within the school. (Veiga, 2010, p. 1)

Processes for the implementation of democratic and participatory management in public schools have become objects of research and reflection in several areas of knowledge since their proposition in the LDB of 1996. Such implementation goes beyond the legal guarantee, since part of the education administrators, given the verticality of the Brazilian educational structure, find that it often presents itself only as a bureaucratic demand. Gadotti (2014) points out that

There is a rising recognition of the importance of popular participation and democratic administration in education. However, the recognition of this importance has not been translated into practical support of this principle. Hence, many education workers have viewed democratic management more as a burden than as a possibility of participation, a mere transfer of responsibility that ends up blaming, especially the teacher, for the school's poor performance. (Gadotti, 2014, p. 4)

The implementation of democratic school culture towards liberation involves tensioning relationships strongly rooted in the hierarchy between the different actors of the school, and within this structure, students traditionally end up occupying the most restrained position in their participation (Mendonça, 2000).

Besides, a good portion of the Brazilian population was formed, both objectively and subjectively, under the authoritarian, disciplinary perspective of the body, mind, and spirit. This means that those responsible for children and adolescents, and the school community in general, do not see the need to occupy management spaces when they have been offered them or even demand those spaces when they are not facilitated.

Thus, it is necessary to stimulate the participation and action of children and adolescents in school to form citizens for a new social order, governed by Democracy and Human Rights, since

[...] citizenship can only be fully understood if it can be translated into recognition of human rights, the practice of equal access to natural and cultural goods, a tolerant attitude, and a leading role in the struggle for a democratic society. Without awareness of individual and collective rights and duties, without the thirst for justice that equitably distributes what has been socially produced, without tolerance of "unconventional" opinions and lifestyles and, above all, without concrete engagement in the search for a democratic society, it is in no way possible to imagine the full exercise of citizenship. This is what we could call democratic participation. (Brazil, 2000, p. 49).

Given these considerations, as mentioned earlier, we understand that the student association is a privileged space for the investigation of the "appropriation of social space" by students and teachers. Thus, in this article, we will analyze the narrative about the mediation process performed by a teacher who was the Student Association ⁶ Advisor at EMEF of CEU Butantã.

Dialogicity and the school as a space for liberation

We understand that the school as a space of liberation and a contributor to integral training needs a pedagogical project, educators, and the entire school community to reflect and practice dialogicity. In the book *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (Pedagogy of the Oppressed) when presenting the concept of dialogicity in education, Paulo Freire (1978) highlights that

Existence, being human, cannot be silent, silently, nor be nourished of false words, but of true words, with which men transform the world. Existing, humanly, is to pronounce the world, it is to modify it. The pronounced world, in turn, becomes problematic to the pronouncing subjects, demanding a new pronouncement from them. (Freire, 1978, p. 90)

For Freire, *the true word*, which transforms the world, is *praxis*, constituted of the dimensions of action and reflection interwoven in such a way that the sacrifice of one or the other *empties* its transforming power.

The inauthentic word, on the other hand, with which reality cannot be transformed, results from the dichotomy that is established among its constituent elements. Thus, when the word of its dimension of action is exhausted, reflection is automatically sacrificed as well, it becomes words, verbalism, blah blah. Being, then, alienated and alienating. It is a hollow word, from which the world's denunciation cannot be expected, since there is no true denunciation without a commitment to transformation, nor this without action. If, on the contrary, it emphasizes or exclusivist action, with the sacrifice of reflection, it also denies true praxis and makes dialogue impossible. (Freire, 1978, p. 90)

6. According to Decree n° 58.840, of July 3rd, 2019, which institutes the Student Guild Program in the Municipal Education Network of São Paulo, SP, Brazil, the Student Guild Advisor must be an adult, member of the school community, indicated by the associates, to guide the activities of the Guild, always respecting the exclusivity of the students.

Here it is worth going back to the words present in the 1996 LDB, quoted in the introduction to this article, and asking ourselves whether, even though democratic management is legally guaranteed, through the principles that guide the preparation of the PPP and the school councils, does the school present itself as a space of liberation or does it prevail itself in control?

Certainly, the school, in its daily life, can become a privileged space for children and adolescents to experience new social relationships, to come into contact with distinct ethical and moral values, to have access to new knowledge, assuming them organically and intentionally, the school has a primordial social function for society, and it can create conditions for liberation, nonetheless, action and reflection must be interwoven in the dialogues that are established in it, corroborating Heller's thought (1977).

Gadotti (2014) warns that there is no sense in talking about democratic management in the technocratic or authoritarian context, as it does not find an echo, and it is necessary to join forces with progressive groups to tense public agents to promote participatory spaces to think, to plan, to monitor, to evaluate, to do the educational in a dialogical perspective, in order to involve all subjects in action-reflection-action processes.

In turn, participatory spaces must be coherent with humanizing and libertarian conceptions, they cannot exist only on paper, by merely fulfilling a bureaucratic flow, but as an instrument with ethical and responsible autonomy: "In an institution, autonomy means to have the power of decision about its objectives and its forms of organization, to remain relatively independent of the central power, to freely manage financial resources" (Libâneo, 2001, p. 115).

We understand that student unions can be configured in spaces that allow listening, speaking, exchange, resolution in a collegial, representative way, in which students can act-reflect on the community in which they are inserted, effectively participating in decisions. Collegiate bodies, in public spaces, may develop this democratic participation since the bodies themselves arose from historical tension and alternative exercises to authoritarianism, represent at least in their principles, the combination of the system of guarantee of rights aimed at control, the promotion and defense of rights, so that the subject, when participating, is formed in the action, affecting at the same time that it affects, starting to make new readings, interpretations and discovering new ways of acting under the world, under a new humanizing perspective.

Democratic culture in its participatory occurrences is understood by social pedagogy as the socio-political domain, which when associated with other domains, contributes to the process of training children, adolescents, young people, and adults, who through practical exercises generate experiences that help to consolidate new social relationships. The sociopolitical is one of the areas of Social Pedagogy where "[...] the student and the educator learn to articulate, mobilize the community, in favor of the life defense, social justice and the guarantee of rights. Associated with the previous domains, it contributes to the exercise of democratic, participatory, and citizenship experiences". (Lopes, 2020, p. 117).

Social Pedagogy "[...] is the science of Social Education, the umbrella that organizes around itself the different systematizations of principles, assumptions, techniques, methods, and strategies to articulate and foster the teaching-learning processes" (Lopes, 2020, p. 91) that aim to systematize democratic pedagogical practices that pass by the socio-educational, socio-cultural, socio-political, socio-pastoral and epistemological domains and reinforce ethical, solidary, and justice values.

For this reason, we are in favor of schools, or subjects, recognizing and assuming the democratic culture and opposing the positivist stances, based on a hierarchical and industrial organization from which authoritarianism dictates the relational dynamics. In schools which democratic culture is valued, just as the CEU policy was conceived,

[...] power is not located at hierarchical levels, but in different spheres of responsibility, guaranteeing interpersonal relationships between equal and different subjects. This difference in the subjects, however, does not mean that one is more than the other, or worse or better, more or less important, nor does it conceive spaces for domination and subservience, as such are attitudes that radically deny citizenship. Power relations do not take place in particularities but in the intersubjectivity of communication between social actors. In this sense, decision-making power needs to be developed based on consultative and deliberative collegiate bodies. (Bordignon & Gracindo, 2002, p. 151-152).

So when we reflect on the democratic school culture within a socio-educational dimension, we reflect the need for school management, which observes and encourages the multiple forms of learning of children, adolescents, their families, and educators, guided by the common good, enabling new forms of democratic coexistence.

We understand that the educational policy recommended by CEU projects can stimulate the educational community to learn how to care, live and share the territory, how to mind and to commit to the city, which means active participation and in this process, the guiding educator has a fundamental role of helping students in the student's association to act, more and more committed to democratic values, seeking collective solutions to their relational, learning and rights problems, among others. Being a mediator educator in the student's union is creating conditions for everyone to occupy spaces, based on the well-being of the collective.

In an institution where students must be their main reason, their organization and participation in the educational process are fundamental to the achievement of the purpose of school education. Thus, providing equal participation in the instances of representative democracy and organization in entities such as unions or similar, autonomously, without the tutelage of the State, is fundamental for the effectiveness of democratic management in education. (Arelaro, Jacomini & Carneiro, p. 1148, 2016).

CEU Butantã, its surroundings, and EMEF

The CEUs, originally developed between 2001 and 2004, in the management of the Labor Party, proposed an effective articulation of the social forces to guarantee the development of children and adolescents, through direct means, through public and social education policies, culture, sport and leisure, and indirect means, public policies of urbanism, assistance and social development, public safety, and health, meeting the demands of society at the time of its creation, mainly of the city most peripheral- region-residents, marked by poverty, violence, precarious housing and lack of access to public facilities.

At the end of 2004, the city of São Paulo had 21 CEUs built according to the original architectural project, which differed from traditional urbanization projects, decentralizing public facilities and taking not only school units to the extremes of the city, but also theater, cinema, courts, gymnasiums, swimming pools, skateboarding track. It is worth mentioning that its implementation had a process of listening and effective participation of the community, mobilizing it, and generating a mobilization for the valorization of popular, decolonial skills and knowledge. Thus, CEUs can be considered as spaces that empower the community, according to the concept of an educating city.⁷

Different community groups occupied CEU (skate, hip hop, samba, forró, football, volleyball, basketball, capoeira, rap, theater, churches, mobilizations, among others), got involved and learned from the spaces and how to dispute for them since those were the only leisure equipment in many districts in the city. Thus, its regulars, when organizing themselves to enjoy it, approached the concept of an educating city where all spaces become educational from their practice and reflection on practice.

We can identify in the original CEU project (São Paulo, 2003) a proposal for training subjects for a culture of rights consolidation, through practical and theoretical actions guided by paradigms of democracy and Human Rights, in which instances of participation are fundamental in the school community and beyond.

However, only an architectural structure, pedagogical projects, and regulatory frameworks alone are not capable of provoking the necessary transformations in the oppressor-oppressed relationship. Educators and students must break the bonds of the old social order that is translated into authoritarian relations, clientelist, assistentialist, technocrats, and abusive. The school has a vital contribution to and in the construction of democracy, as follows:

7. Cf. Letter from educating city – Available in: < <https://www.edcities.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Carta-Portugues.pdf>> . Acessado em: 06 nov. 2020.

[...] the construction of Democracy is to promote the ethical principles of freedom, dignity, mutual respect, justice and equity, solidarity, dialogue in daily life; it is to find ways to comply with the constitutional principle of equality, which requires sensitivity to the issue of cultural diversity and decisive actions concerning the problems generated by social injustice. (Brazil, 1998, p. 129).

CEU Butantã is located in the sub-prefecture of Butantã, which is formed by five districts: Butantã, Morumbi, Vila Sônia, Raposo Tavares, and Rio Pequeno, which represent an area of 56.1 km², inhabited by just over 428 thousand people⁸. According to the Butantã Network website, formed in 2000 to bring together civil society organizations to strengthen network action in order to respond to the region's demands:

[...] this region presents a condensed view of all the city's problems: inequalities, potential, and difficulties. The same region where high-standard houses are located has more than 80 slums, a stark picture of injustice, vulnerability, and social exclusion, in which we see acute issues such as low education and income, aggravated by the lack of public services quality. (Butantã Network, 2008)⁹

The structure of EMEF CEU BUTANTÃ¹⁰, which is one of the educational units of CEU Butantã, offers a total of 702 seats, 437 for students from the first to the fifth years of elementary school (distributed in 14 classrooms) and 265 for students from the sixth to the ninth years (9 classrooms).

Regarding its pedagogical proposal, during the visits to carry out the research, we could observe that there is a strong concern of the teaching staff and management with works focused on the territory. Regarding democratic management, we highlight the following excerpt from its PPP:

The public sense of a school is achieved by democratic work. Public school is made by several hands: teachers, students, families, professionals, neighbors. The decisions connected to this school should also be done with several hands. Therefore, the social quality of the school is the result of this collective participation. For a democratic functioning to occur, it is necessary: - transparency; access to information; peer organization; open spaces for participation; division of power and responsibilities; dealing with conflicts arising from different perspectives. (São Paulo, 2019, p. 65)

However, this same PPP does not specify pedagogical projects that foster or explain democratic practices in the public space, even recognizing some instances such as APM, School Council, and the Student Union. School communities lack the understanding of the union as a necessary student organization that must have a clear and intentional socio-educational and socio-political proposal. We will discuss this below.

Methodology

With the fundamental concern of capturing social phenomena at school, in the way they are presented, we have used the ethnographic methodological approach. In this process, it should be noted that there were no subjects observed as objects, data providers, but subjects of knowledge, always in training and invited to be co-participants in the research.

Thus, before the research, there were much awareness and mobilization meetings, presenting the proposal to the managers of the school units, to the Secretary of Education and members of the Regional Board of Education (DRE, in Portuguese) Butantã. We also held meetings and workshops with teachers to join the project. Having done that, the researchers were divided into three groups by the school units: Center for Early Childhood Education (CEI, in Portuguese), Municipal School for Early Childhood Education (EMEI, in Portuguese), and EMEF.

In the EMEF group, for better organization of the work, there was also a division into three subgroups, with the criterion of preliminary observations and reflection after meetings with the 'professors participating

8. Source: <https://www.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/cidade/secretarias/subprefeitura/subprefeitura/dados_demograficos/index.php?p=12758> Accessed on: 20 mar. 2020.

9. Source: <<https://redebutanta.blogspot.com/2018/10/carta-aberta-rede-butanta-reuniao.html>>. Accessed on: 20 mar. 2020.

10. Source: <<http://eolgerenciamento.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/frmgerencial/NumerosEscola.aspx?Cod=019262>>. Accessed on 01 nov. 2020.

in the research'. In this process, we identified the library, interdisciplinary projects, and the Student Union as potential research fields.

In this study, we have chosen to research the Student Union. It is worth noting that one of the authors of this article was, at the end of his elementary school period and in high school, a member of student unions, in which he experienced practices and learning that have contributed to his life project. Choosing the union as a research field was also a way to contribute to the systematization of experiences that support other actions-reflections that have been affecting the training of thousands of students.

Thus, initial visits to EMEF were scheduled, as a way of approaching the guiding professor of the union team, who participated in the research, for linking, organizing the work schedule, observing some teachers' and students' activities and routine at previously agreed times.

Subsequently, there were dialogues with students involved in the union, yarning circles, construction of narrative maps, and a semi-structured interview with the guiding teacher, who was considered as a source of data for this article, identified by the acronym GT (Guiding Teacher).

Data analysis

The guiding professor of the Student Union has worked at the Municipal Network of the city of São Paulo for fourteen years, having started her activities at CEU Butantã since its inauguration. Her initial training area is physical education for children in the literacy phase. She was a CEU manager for two years and worked in the Municipal Education Department with the staff of a social program aimed at serving young people. When talking about herself, at the beginning of the interview, she highlights that she likes to work with young people and children and that she has always been interested in "*processes and methodologies that give and start from what children know ... that give more voice ... the teacher does not come with the whole process ready ... it is more meaningful and contextualized to build with them*".

The student organization at CEU Butantã

Art. 1 It is instituted, The Student Union Program in the Municipal Education Network of São Paulo aiming at promoting the participation of students in the daily life of the school unit, as well as encouraging the exercise of citizenship and democratic engagement. (Decree nº 58.840, of July 3, 2019)

Since 1985 the union has been recognized as a legitimate instance of student organization and since then several legal structures have pointed to the need for its implementation. However, 35 years have not been enough for its implementation in the entire public education network. Thus, we asked the GT of the guild, which were the school's motivations for the creation of the guild, and we were informed that the decision came directly from the pedagogical coordination, due to recurrent discussions in the teachers' room about the difficulties they have found dealing with the topic of *student autonomy*.

Interviewer: *Why did the school choose to create or resume the guild? Was there a discussion of the collective of teachers, was it a norm, a demand from the students themselves? Anyway, how was this process?*

GT: ... In the fundamental two ... they are younger, right ... they are between 9 and 13 years old the ones who participate in the guild ... but differently from high school ... a discussion that always comes back the teachers' room is how to help them to **become** more autonomous? How do we **give voice** to children and adolescents ...? It is a discussion on autonomy, how we **give** autonomy **at this age** ... But I know that last year our study project involved the question of autonomy so all the time there was a discussion on how we **give** the boys voice and **how they can act as protagonists**.

Regarding the theme of autonomy, it is worth mentioning in GT's speech expressions such as

"helping to **become** more autonomous", "How we **give voice** to children and adolescents", "**how we give autonomy at this age**".

The use of verbs such as „give“ and „help to become“ leads us, at first, to a hierarchy of knowledge and ways of being, as if autonomy were something that could be transferred from the teacher to the students. Freire (1978), when discussing banking education, warns us that “Authentic liberation, which is humanization in process, is not something that is deposited in men. It is not another word, hollow, mythifying. It is praxis, which implies the action and reflection of men about the world to transform it ”(p. 77). But, how can we create favorable conditions for the action and reflection of the students while still offering the necessary learning support? How to create conditions for *the children’s walk towards autonomy*? Here, again, we resort to Freirian ideas:

If I work with children, I must be aware of the difficult transition or journey from heteronomy to autonomy, aware of the responsibility of my presence, which can be both helpful and disruptive to the anxious search of students; if I work with young people or adults, I should be no less attentive to what my work can mean as a stimulus or not to the necessary rupture with something that is defectively set and waiting to be overcome. Primarily, my position must be that of respect for the person who wants to change or who refuses to change. (Freire, 1998, p. 36)

In the GT’s speech, even though expressions that refer to the “*donation*” of autonomy are present, there are also expressions that refer to the effective action of students: “*how they can act as protagonists*”, which gives us evidence of a characteristic tension of the children’s educational process, which in general has positioned the teacher as the protagonist, in addition to assigning other roles to her, such as responsible for caring, protecting, and, at the same time, creating conditions for emancipation. Considering this confusion of roles attributed to the teacher in the school routine, her practice must move towards mediation as a relational and educational principle. The teacher’s mediating role in the process of “walking from *heteronomy* to *autonomy*”, when he occupies the role of Student Guild Advisor, is also shown in the following statement:

GT: Students can have an advisor; they choose an advisor teacher working with them ... I see the need ... **as they are still young people in the group process, it is not simple, right?** Listening to one another, accepting a different opinion, accepting that they lost the voting in these processes, then... **it is not having a teacher who will tell you how the guild will work ... but it is only to look at legislation ... to ensure everyone’s voice and give support.**

Youth protagonism and the socio-political domain

When commenting on her experience as an advisor to the group of students in the process of forming the guild, a relatively long process that lasted for six months, the teacher brings up some themes, starting with the identification of the group representativeness as it was restricted to a few EMEF series. and she begins her approach by presenting the rules that govern the institution of a school union:

GT: The first thing I put in was about the new rules ... you can choose an advisor teacher ... I’m here introducing myself to you ... if you want ... I can be your advisor teacher ... you are the protagonists of the whole process ... the idea here is to help you a little to solve and resolve doubts ... difficulties and some processes.

In the process of approaching students who had already been meeting under the guidance of the pedagogical coordinator, the teacher explains the role of guild advisor, makes herself available for this mediation function, and, mainly, highlights the guild as a space for the students.

GT: When I talked about the election issue, they raised a problem, aren’t we the guild already? What do you mean? You come here and say you have to make an election! I spoke of the importance of being a democratically elected representative, pointing that they represent all students in all grades ... **they understood, but they did not accept.** They said: we are the ones who have dedicated ourselves so far ... then in the election, we may not be elected because not everyone likes us ... **we want to show you that we are good.** I put the problem to them and that it is **okay to be the way we are until the end of the year, as a training group to prepare for the electoral slate organization,** understanding how the guild works and you do some actions, but not as an elected guild and that I would not receive the budget,

right?. **When I said that they were not going to receive the money, it was an issue that meant a lot for them, because some wanted it, but six of them who were in the eighth year did not want to give up and ended up convincing the others.** I know that there are several ways to compose a guild. I have already had contact with some schools that have a less vertical association, others that have a president, a secretary, and such.

At the very first meeting, there are signs of how fragile a democratic and participatory process is and that there is a need to always reaffirm it. The mentioned school came from a long period without a School Guild, limiting itself to the choice of student representatives for the School Council. This choice was made by general elections that could reflect and represent the will of most students, but rather the need to meet legal standards, as we could identify in one of the statements of the GT: *“Until when are we going to make a process of choosing student representatives to the School Council? When you have a guild, it represents the student segment. But there is no guild, so we are the ones who choose and not the student”*.

Faced with the possibility of an election to legitimize their representativeness with the student community, the group does not accept it, leaving the advisor to present a middle-term solution *“all right, we can be, until the end of the year, as a training group preparing for the organization of electoral slates, understanding how the guild works and you do some actions, but not as an elected guild and that I would not receive the money”*. It is worth mentioning that, when proposing this solution, the teacher shows coherence with her presentation speech *“the protagonists of the whole process are you ... the idea here is to help you a little to solve and resolve doubts ... difficulties and some processes”*.

It is observed that the presentation of a solution by the GT does not end the discussion and there is still a process of negotiation among the students so that a decision is reached by the group: *“When I said that they were not going to receive the money it was an issue for them because some wanted it, but six who were in the eighth year didn’t want to give up and ended up convincing the others”*. It initiates the beginning of a dialogical mediation process, in which different voices speak and, with the support of the teacher, they can reach solutions.

It is also worth mentioning that in this first contact between the teacher and the students, youth protagonism emerges in a way in statements such as *„we have dedicated ourselves so far“*, *„they understood, but did not accept it“* and *„we want to show you that we are good“*. More emphatically, it appears when the group chooses to stop receiving funds for the maintenance of the union to guarantee itself the possibility of conducting the election process.

For Costa (2007), youth protagonism “as a modality of educational action, is the creation of spaces and conditions capable of enabling young people to engage in activities aimed at solving real problems, acting as a source of initiative, freedom, and commitment”. On the one hand, we can say that the process of building a student union may facilitate a process of youth protagonism. On the other hand, the origin of the term protagonist, still in Costa’s viewpoint, elucidates the conflicts that need to be mediated by the figure of the guild leader, in order to reconcile participation and representativeness and the need for visibility and recognition of the young participants in this process.

Proto means the first, the main. *Agon* means to fight. *Agonist*, a fighter. Protagonist, literally, means the main fighter. In theater, the term came to designate the actors who conduct the plot, the leading actors. The same is also true of the characters in a novel. * In our case, that is, in the field of education, the term youth protagonism designates the performance of young people as the main character of an initiative, activity, or project aimed at solving real problems. The core of the role, therefore, is the active and constructive participation of young people in the life of the school, the community, or the wider society. (Costa, 2007, p. 10)

Considering the definition presented by Costa (2007), as already highlighted, the report of the Guiding Teacher about this first meeting with the group of students brings an initial divergence between the components of the group, which leads us to the definition of the *protagonist* as the *main fighter*; some want to make the election and receive the budget for the union’s actions, while others prefer not to receive it and keep the group as it is. This divergence brings a latent tension between two forms of protagonism that may come to be concrete in the group’s next actions, one in which the student participation is guided by an

individualistic point of view, anchored in personal recognition needs, common to the students' age group, and another, in which the participation is configured as a form of appropriation of knowledge inherent to the socio-political domain, which advocates collective participation, aimed at the common good.

The initial impasse was resolved, as we will see in the excerpt below, but the tension reappeared in several ways throughout the teacher's reports on the process.

GT: And, **at that time they chose not to receive the money and not make an election then we took it to the school council because it was not an issue that I could solve on my own, you know.** And in the council, there were teachers, the school management, and it was approved as they wanted, also because the election process takes time, you know, so they didn't want it at that time, because we were near the end of the school year, the ones who were on the 8th and knew they were going to move to another city and leave school. **They preferred to take action and run projects as a group of people interested in doing things for the collective.** After making the election of the guild for the next year.

It is interesting to note that in the case above, the solution proposed by the students had to be endorsed by the School Council, placing the issue of protagonism more urgently in the daily life of the school community and demonstrating an unequivocal characteristic of the vertical and pyramidal school management structure where students are the basis of this structure. Still, concerning the protagonism, it will always be in dispute and conflict with the hierarchy of the school structure, since many of the actions proposed by students must be referenda in other instances of collective decision (school council), or dependent on individual decisions made by the school management, by pedagogical coordination.

Mediation and listening strategies

As we can see, although the process of building a student union is linked to a legal regulation, which institutionalizes it as an instance of student representation in the school community, the process itself is constituted by knowledge of the socio-political, education, psychosocial domains, and that has, in this specific case, the quality of the mediation process (also provided in rules) for an adult, a fundamental role for its effectiveness.

Let us see, then, in the excerpts below, some actions proposed by the educator responsible for guiding the student union.

GT: We made a dynamic for them to identify **what is good in school** and **what is bad from their point of view** ... in our second meeting ... I wanted to show them that my look is not the same as the other's ... **what are we going to think about as a guild, what and where we can interfere, what you want to do and even the order of priority** ... so there was, in fact, on that first day a broader discussion. **There was also a time for them to introduce themselves** as there were fifth-year-children who didn't know the others, so we took two class-period to ask all those questions.

We can observe that the role of the guiding teacher, as a mediator, is being constructed in a dialogical way, when she tries to create a listening space, valuing the existence of different points of view and desires, and focusing on the construction of what we can identify as being a *true word*, in Freire's concept of the word *praxis*, which implies interwoven reflection and action, based on the question "*what are we going to think as a guild, what and where can we interfere with what you want to do and even the order of priority*", followed by a recognition of the need to create an environment of integration between representatives of different groups and ages.

The teacher does not neglect her role as mediator in the process, she invites students to reflect on the responsibilities inherent in the social role that they intend to occupy.

In this process, triggered by the questions proposed by the educator, there is the possibility of fundamental socio-political learning, as it involves reflecting on ethical and moral issues implicitly present in questions

such as: who are we? who do we represent? what is our role in this school? what are our institutional limits? with whom should we talk to make our wishes come true? among others.

The mediation strategy described here could be observed in other situations, such as, for example, complaints from students about the performance of other teachers, with due guidance from the mediator teacher. Also, it was possible to observe, mainly, that the group was constituted as such from actions and reflections on its practices and distribution of responsibilities, as we can see in the excerpts highlighted below, which show how the identification of maintenance problems in toilets ended up mobilizing issues of gender, of relationship with the school's operational and cleaning employees and of relationship with the environment, among others.

GT: The maintenance group was more a girls' demand as they complained a lot about the restrooms. It was very dirty, and the cleaning operators were not to be blamed ... **they did not feel safe, with their intimacy respected.** They raised those questions, and this was a problem that we had **to take to the director, or we could also take it to the board** ... But they would have to have a proposal to solve the problem ... some thought of a hygiene kit with an absorbent for the girls, but they said if they have a kit, they would destroy it. The problem was culture, and to change it, we had to generate awareness in people. And **then it was really cool that they wanted to have a conversation with only the girls first**, the boys also thought they had problems, but they weren't as big as the girls'. And if we want to change a cultural issue, it takes time ..., but the girls produced, posters and spread them all over the restrooms so they don't **waste water, wash their hands, don't throw absorbent in the toilet, common usage posters**, which were made by their own and with time some of them were destroyed, but the vast majority remained until the end of the year. So at the end of the year, it was also a positive evaluation, and we will have to replace some of them, that is ok, because it is normal, but that the vast majority had remained, but **it was still not enough to change culture; it is a bigger issue.**

It is interesting to note that a process that begins with the legal need to institutionalize student representation begins to present some impact on school life in its most diverse dimensions, exposing the conflicts and contradictions of the school institution itself, its hierarchy, its communication difficulties, its taboo themes; as in the instance of lectures on suicide

GT: So, it would be the guild's first training action with the entire school. That at first, I thought it had to be for smaller groups, but if I bring a psychologist, he can, maybe, have two circles of conversation, I mean, people don't have time, you know. So, let's do it with the seventh, eighth, and ninth years, but nobody wanted to give up and, that is the cool thing, about having a representative from each year.

For being a space for students, a legitimate communication channel between students and the school community, the union guides and proposes, based on the needs of its peers, pedagogical, cultural, and political proposals that, until then, were within the scope of transversal themes or are considered hidden curricula, that is, they are not the responsibility of any discipline, but they break out in the daily relationships between students in the school environment.

Hence, a school community that welcomes and enhances the demands of students, their exercises in protagonism, and autonomy in the search of the resolution of their conflicts, expands the perspective of integral education from themes that are generated at the center of students' interest.

Final considerations

Analyzing the process, it was possible to identify that the teacher's mediation strategies want to walk with the students, helping them, through listening, to realize how the process is more significant than the result itself. It requires teachers with the faculty to respect the process, the experience, the creativity, the time, the will of children and adolescents, it requires patience and a belief in the potential of the other.

In order to be able to develop such mediation proposals, the educator must seek strategies that may not be provided by the school structure, which tends to be rigid, dominated by a school calendar, fractional learning

time, amount of students above the appropriate, predetermined curriculum, the teacher's workday, among others. This bureaucratic process does not contribute to the students to experience, reflect the experience, evaluate the process and results, learning and apprehending with all this dialectical movement.

We point out that after 35 years of existence of the law that endorses the student organization, specific public policies are necessary, which, in our conception, are correlated with the social educator, responsible for the pedagogical processes related to human coexistence, being properly trained to act under the perspectives of socio-educational, socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-pastoral domains, mitigating the misunderstandings of overloading teachers with assignments of which they are not trained, or are not even convinced.

This is noticeable in one of the results where the inherent contradiction between the role of student guild counselor, and the concepts of autonomy, youth protagonism, the need to establish a democratic culture in public environments, which in the presented case is overcome thanks to the educator's experience in other social mediation processes.

In this perspective, the presence of the adult in the guild was not of overlapping and/or domination of the ‚space-time‘ of children and adolescents. This does not mean the educator abstained, canceled himself. His presence contributes to youth protagonism through problematization of themes (suicide and gender violence), and actions, debates, lectures, posters proposed by students, and through ethical reflection themes hitherto distant or minimized by the school community as a whole started to be part of all members' daily life.

What we reinforce is the constant necessity to create different spaces in the city, so that teenagers and young people have new life experiences, especially those that offer conditions for human coexistence and the exercise of politics. As Paulo Freire and Vigotski (2009) explain, a new dialogical experience allows the understanding of the previous experience and awareness to follow new paths, preferably the democratic ones. This perspective is in line with a vision of a citizenship school or the educating city.

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