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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore education as practice of freedom, identifying possibilities and challenges to its development within school. Towards this aim, I intend to create a dialogue between theory and practice, connecting ideas on humanisation and freedom to the practice of two schools in Brazil, which are guided by principles of a liberating education, such as dialogue, problematization, autonomy and engagement. These were chosen as core themes for constructing the analysis, from which different elements of the schools were discussed. In the conclusion, I present reflections that relate the paradox of school education to the paradox of freedom itself.

Keywords: liberating education; freedom; humanisation; school; dialogue
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INTRODUCTION

From these pages I hope at least the following will endure: my trust in the people, and my faith in men and women, and in the creation of a world in which it will be easier to love.

(Freire, 1974:40)

This work arises from a dream to grow a learning community in the place where I come from, Brazil. This dream came to my consciousness seven years ago, when I started to engage with the reality of state schools in São Paulo, during my internship in Science and Biology Education. Before that, I had never experienced a school education different from the one I received, in a private institution recognised by its high fees and levels of approval in university. I had chosen to do my internship in a state school to get in touch with a different context from mine, though my intention to graduate in Biology was to work with animals and plants in some wild place far from human civilization. However, I did not expect that those experiences would radically change my perception of the world and of myself. I faced a contrast that my eyes could not ignore. Even the dark tones of the dirty concrete, scrawled chairs and blackboards were brighter than the ones covering the children’s expressions and the teacher’s eyes.

The teacher’s indifference to the student’s shouts of dissatisfaction, despair and rebellion arouse a deep indignation in me, challenging me to engage with the students and subjects in a different way. Along with my experiences in the school, I was reading my first words on pedagogy, from the Brazilian educator and sociologist Paulo Freire. His true words have found meaning in me, and his praxis has inspired me since then to explore ways to develop education as practice of freedom (Freire 1967). I have recognized the oppressions caused and suffered by people, and the contradictions that sustain our society, of which I also take part in. Since then, a great motivation and challenge for me was to help overcome these contradictions and injustices through engagement in dialogue with people, aiming to co-create a learning community in which we could humanise ourselves together.
From my first internship, I continued to engage in different state schools, including the one where I worked for a couple of years. However, gradually I realised that the contradictions that sustain our society also sustain school itself, which made me question if Freire’s ideas of education as practice of freedom could be developed within the school context. Bearing this in mind, this work is an expression of my curiosity and interest in looking for examples of practices that dialogue with the theories that I have been motivated by. Throughout the following words, I aim to explore education as practice of freedom, identifying possibilities and challenges to its development within school, in an attempt to answer the question “how can education as practice of freedom be developed within school?”

My interest was to search for inspiring practices in Brazil, where I found a large number of innovative educational initiatives. Besides, there is no unified education policy or national curriculum in Brazil; instead, municipalities and states introduce their own policies, while individual schools (private or state) construct their own político-pedagogical plans, which are guiding frameworks that compose the basis of a curriculum (McCowan 2009). However, school education is still far from a liberating praxis for the great majority of the population, due to systemic problems that have solidified limit-situations both for the individuals and institutions.

In this work I investigate both a private and a state school in São Paulo, which are commonly recognised by their emancipatory practices based on dialogue and autonomy. While the former is a small democratic school, run through collective decision-making, the latter is a centre of adult education for those who had not completed regular school. These schools are explored further in Chapter 3, followed by an analysis based on key principles of education as practice of freedom.

Defining education as practice of freedom is to acknowledge that freedom is not an end in itself, neither a goal to be achieved through education (Freire 1967), but a state that can and must be practiced in the present moment. In this work, the original concept “educação libertadora” is translated to liberating education (Streck et al. 2012), recognising that terms such as “libertarian education” and “freedom education” have been used in multiple ways, also referring to neoliberal and religious ideas respectively, which resulted in contradictions with
Freire’s concept and misunderstandings within the field of knowledge. Here, liberating education is understood as a process of awakening consciousness of ourselves, others and the world, through reflection and action (praxis). Here, dialogue is placed at the centre of education, as praxis in itself and an act of love toward humanity. Therefore education as practice of freedom is also education as practice of our humanisation.

This research follows a case study approach, based on direct experiences within the schools, allowing detailed data collection and in-depth investigation (Creswell 2013). This investigation intends to dialogue theory with practice, and reflections with actions, in an attempt to encourage the practice of freedom within ourselves, our schools and beyond. With this purpose, I must also challenge the conventions of an objective and impersonal writing that separates people from the world, recognizing that it also reinforces our detachment from reality and lack of engagement with transformation. Therefore, in coherence with the values defended here, I take my subjective position as a human being to argue on the side of freedom, humanisation, hope and love.

The following work is organised in four chapters, starting with a literature review (Chapter 1) on general ideas about freedom, liberating education and the contradiction between education and school. This theoretical foundation explores key principles of liberating education, such as dialogue, autonomy, problematization and engagement, which are later used as themes for the construction of the analysis. Next, I describe the method (Chapter 2) developed in this research, giving details about its process and also referring to the methodology of case study adopted. Following, I analyse the data collected (Chapter 3) within two parts, one introducing the schools and another discussing the data in relation to four themes chosen. One of the schools, however, is referred to as a complementary case, from which I take elements to contrast and relate the two different contexts and practices. Finally, in the last chapter (Chapter 4) I reflect on my research experience, relating it to my research question and aim, and pointing out the perspectives that emerged from this work.

From here, I invite the reader to dialogue with me, to bring new words and meanings to the following ideas, taking an active position toward them and reinventing reality.
CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I explore and relate ideas of several authors in regard to freedom, education and school within three sections: “Freedom as humanisation”, “Education as practice of freedom” and “The paradox of school education”. This theoretical framework is incorporated into the analysis, as reference for the interpretation and discussion of data. Aiming to explore education as practice of freedom, this literature review begins with the definition of freedom as humanisation, focusing on the human’s potential of a greater consciousness. Following these ideas, I advocate education as practice of humanisation and freedom, based on the perspective of Freire and those who believe in the transformative potential of education. In this section I also highlight key principles of liberating education, which are later converted into themes for the construction of the analysis. Finally, the last section of this chapter discusses the paradox of school education, questioning whether education as practice of freedom can be developed within school. This discussion is made contrasting two different perspectives, one in defence of deschooling and another in defence of school. Moreover, this section attempts to build a dialogue between these two perspectives from a radical search concerned with the root of the matter: freedom.
Freedom as humanisation

Freedom, liberation. This must be the purpose of man. To become free, escape the servitude - this is what a man should fight for as soon as he becomes, even briefly, aware of his *situation*. For him, this is the only way out, because nothing is possible while he remains a slave, internally and externally.

(Gurdjieff in Ouspensky 1949:126)

In this work I define freedom as humanisation, along with those who believe in the potential of human beings to develop all their powers for greater harmony, love and awareness (Illich 1970). By humanisation I mean to become more fully human, to *be more* (Freire 1974), through the awakening of consciousness of ourselves and the world. However, freedom as a state to be constantly searched, developed and affirmed – not as a final stage - implies the recognition of our dehumanisation, of our oppression in the first place. As Ouspensky (1949) would say, in order to become free we must first realise our prison; while we do not comprehend this, while we believe that we are already free, there is no opportunity for our freedom.

Likewise, Fromm (1956) argues that most people live under the illusion that they are free, that they follow their own ideas and inclinations and arrive at their opinions as result of their own thinking – and that it is just a (fortunate) coincidence that their ideas are the same as those of the majority. Moreover, people seem to believe that they are free as long as there is no external force – a person, group, nation – coercing them. From this perspective, “the abolition of external domination seems to be not only a necessary but also a sufficient condition to attain the cherished goal: freedom of the individual” (Fromm, 1942:2).

This understanding of freedom as the absence of external coercion is what Berlin (1958) calls *negative freedom*. In this sense, we are free to the extent that no one interferes with our activity, with our ability to act as we please. Thus, we are “unfree” (coerced or enslaved) once we are prevented by others from doing what we could otherwise do (Berlin 1958). Based on this perspective, “the wider the area of non-interference, the wider my freedom” (Berlin 1958:3). Likewise, this definition of freedom is commonly adopted by those who defend
less interference from the State and more individual rights, as in the tradition of liberal individualism.

However, this concept of *negative freedom* must be problematized firstly from the acknowledgement that we are social and not isolated individuals. This means that the freedom of some depends on the restraint of others (Berlin 1958). For example, if one desires to murder another, one’s freedom would depend on the violation of the other’s freedom to live. In the same way, if one has the freedom to live, another has the freedom to murder constrained. This philosophy of freedom as “area of non-interference” has led to the establishment of a justice system that became the responsible authority to define and regulate the limits of our “area of freedom”. However, our justice system has shown that freedom does not promote equality, fairness or social justice. Although freedom would rely on less constraint from oppressions such as poverty, the freedom of unlimited accumulation of capital is still preserved, and so are the economic and social inequalities of our society. In other words, the freedom of a person, class or nation has depended on the misery of a number of other human beings (Berlin 1958), proving that the justice system that promotes this freedom is, ironically, unjust and immoral.

Moreover, the history of humanity has been centred on the effort to gain freedom from – political, economic, and spiritual – chains that constrained people. “Freedom has won many battles”, yet, “many died in those battles in the conviction that to die in the struggle against oppression was better than to live without freedom” (Fromm 1942:1). The root of the issue is that people make wars “in the name of freedom”, as if freedom could be achieved through dehumanisation – of others and of themselves. They seem to be unaware that the root cause of oppression could not be other rather than dehumanisation itself and that freedom is an act of love toward humanity (Freire 1974).

If wars have many causes, some inside men and others outside, it is necessary to start from the ones that are inside men themselves (Ouspensky 1949). Likewise, Dewey (1940) recognises that the threat to our freedom is not the existence of external totalitarian forces, but the existence, within our own personal attitudes and institutions, of conditions which have given a victory to external authority, discipline, uniformity and dependence. Therefore, the battlefield is also within ourselves and our institutions (Dewey 1940). However,
we do not oppose resistance to these external influences because we are **slaves**; if we were **more human**, we would be capable to resist these influences and stop killing ourselves (Ouspensky 1949). This is why freedom should be understood and practiced as humanisation, based on love of life.

The capacity to resist to these influences requires **positive freedom**, which is built from our wish to be our own masters, conscious of ourselves as thinking, willing, active beings, bearing responsibility for our choices and able to explain them by our own ideas and purposes (Berlin 1958). **Positive freedom**, differently from **negative freedom**, is built through action-reflection (*praxis*), realising, problematizing and deconstructing our conditionings and becoming conscious of ourselves and the world (Freire 1974).

There is no **growth** without some reconstruction, some remaking, of impulses and desires in the form in which they first show themselves. This remaking involves inhibition of impulse in its first estate. The alternative to externally imposed inhibition is inhibition through an individual’s own **reflection** and judgement. [...] For thinking is stoppage of the immediate manifestation of impulse until that impulse has been brought into connection with other possible tendencies to **action** so that a more comprehensive and coherent plan of activity is formed.

(Dewey 1938:64)

Therefore, **positive freedom** is characterised by active and conscious attitudes, rather than passive and conformed positions. On the other hand, Fromm (1956:13) argues that “people **want** to conform to a much higher degree than they are forced to” in order to be socially accepted and overcome their aloneness and separateness. This separateness, in its turn, is realised only when people start to become aware of themselves as unique individuals, when they start to separate themselves from their **limit-situations** (Freire 1974). Therefore, this awakening – along with the uncomfortable feelings that emerge from it – is an important step towards (positive) freedom. Yet, most people cannot tolerate their loneliness, fearing freedom and escaping from it, back to a state of conformity (Fromm 1942).

However, we can choose to go deep into ourselves and continue growing inner freedom. Hart (2009) reminds us that “our lives are full of moments when we have a choice between going a little deeper or moving to the next item, person or task” (1). By entering into the depth he meant opening ourselves, enabling an
expanded perception. “Through opening we travel past points of certainty and meet both the world and ourselves in fresh ways, all real living is meeting” (Hart 2009:1). The idea of positive freedom can also be related to the concept of self-actualization explored by Maslow (1965), which means experiencing fully, vividly, selflessly, with full concentration and total presence. At the moment when the self is actualizing itself, the person is wholly and fully human (Maslow 1965). As individuals, we experience such moments occasionally, though they can be prolonged throughout long works and, above all, conscious efforts in the direction of a definite purpose (Ouspensky 1949). Moreover, according to Maslow (1965), our purpose is to find processes that help us to become all we are capable of becoming – capable of being more (Freire 1974).

In conclusion, positive freedom, differently from negative freedom, can only be built from inside out, within each individual – it does not depend on external factors. This might be hard to accept once we know the dehumanised conditions in which people live, leading us to question whether it is possible to develop positive freedom in such limit-situations. To answer this question we should also remind ourselves of those who have been in dehumanised conditions and yet have humanised themselves through acts of love toward themselves and others. Thus, if we have hope in humanity, we must believe in and become a positive answer.

Likewise, Fromm (1942:222) answers positively the question “is there a state of positive freedom in which the individual exists as an independent self and yet is not isolated but united with the world, with other men, and nature?”

The process of growing freedom does not constitute a vicious circle, and man can be free and yet not alone, critical and yet not filled with doubts, independent and yet an integral part of mankind. This freedom man can attain by the realization of his self, by being himself.

Therefore, the awareness of our separateness could invite us to embrace our uniqueness and creative power, which could then transform the world inside and outside ourselves. Moreover, love, an art to be learned (Fromm 1956), seems to be the essence to both overcome our aloneness - by giving love to ourselves - and retain our integrity within the world - by giving love to others. Thus, to live freedom as humanisation is to become more fully capable of love.
Education as practice of freedom

Problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming — as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality. In this incompletion and this awareness lie the very roots of education as an exclusively human manifestation.

(Freire 1974:84)

Freire (1974) refers to problem-posing education as synonymous with liberating education, recognising that our vocation for humanisation is characteristic of our search for being more, through which we are constantly seeking, venturing curiously into the knowledge of ourselves and the world. Thus, our search for being more reveals that we can overcome our limit-situations through the development of consciousness. It is in this sense that Freire (1996) claims that we are conditioned, but not determined beings.

Likewise, Fromm (1956) claims that when humans are born, they are thrown into a situation that is indefinite, uncertain and open. As man and woman are gifted with reason, they are “life being aware of itself” (8), they have awareness of themselves, of their past and the possibilities of their future (Fromm 1956). However, Fromm (1942) elucidates that people usually live in a state of pre-freedom, in which they are “conscious” of themselves only as a member of a certain community, race, corporation etc. – hence, they grow freedom in the extent that they separate themselves from their traditional bounds, from conformity. Moreover, it is from this assumption that we talk on becoming (human and free), from the acknowledgment of our unfinishedness (Freire 1967) and our continuous process of development.

As [humans] separate themselves from the world, which they objectify, as they separate themselves from their own activity, locate the seat of their decisions in themselves and in their relations with the world and others, they overcome the situations which limit them: the “limit-situations.” (Freire 1974:99)

Thus, limit-situations should not be seen as "impassable boundaries where possibilities end", but as “real boundaries where all possibilities begin; they are
not the frontier which separates being from nothingness, but the frontier which separates being from being more" (Vieira Pinto in Freire 1974:99). Likewise, Counts (1932) claims that we are beings in a situation, finding ourselves rooted in temporal-spatial conditions that both mark us and are marked by us. Therefore, discovering ourselves inserted in limit-situations is not only a step towards freedom, but also a practice of freedom and education in itself.

However, the realisation of limit-situations depends on the development of critical thinking, which is at the core of education as practice of freedom. According to Hooks (2010), critical thinking is the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with a perspective to improve it, determining what is significant among a range of facts and interactions – which need to be discovered in the first place. Furthermore, it is a way of approaching ideas aiming to understand core, underlying truths, not simply the superficial truth most obviously visible (Hooks 2010). Therefore, through the development of critical thinking, a limit-situation is dissolved, being no longer a dense, enveloping reality or a tormenting blind alley, but an objective-problematic situation (Freire 1974). This is also a process of empowerment, in which people engage themselves with reality and take an active position to intervene in it.

Freire (1967) refers to critical thinking as reflection about the very condition of existence, by means of which people discover themselves to be in a situation. However, liberation is not built only by means of reflection, but equally by action. The interdependent relationship between these two elements is what Freire (1974) names praxis, advocating that these must be intimately connected (one feeding the other) in order to transform the world. Similarly, Chomsky (1971), inspired by Russell, claims that “to inquire and create are the centres around which all human pursuits more or less directly revolve” (48), and declares that “to change the world is the real task” (11). Furthermore, by acting upon and transform the world, people move toward ever-new possibilities of fuller and richer life, individually and collectively (Freire 1974).

People reflect on their own situation to the extent that they are challenged to act upon it (Freire 1974); in the same way, they act in their situation to the extent that they are challenged to reflect on it. Thus, education as practice of freedom is based on problematization of reality, recognising the world not as a static and closed order which people must passively accept and conform, but as a
“problem” to be worked on and solved (Freire 1979). Only this problematization could lead to conscientização (process of becoming conscious) and hence, engagement and transformation of reality.

Regarding this unfolding process as the thread of education as practice of freedom, Hart (2009) proposes a map of the depths of knowing and learning which move through six layers, from information to transformation – from surface to roots. According to him, information (first layer) is at the surface, taking place as currency for the educational exchange. Information opens up into knowledge (second layer), where bits of information are brought together into the whole of mastery and skill, from direct experience. This knowledge can then lead to intentionality and grow intelligence (third layer), which cut, shape, and create new information and knowledge through the dialectic of intuition and analysis. Further down lies understanding (fourth layer), which is a look through the eye of the heart, as a way of knowing that serves character and community. Wisdom (fifth layer) is then cultivated blending insight into what is true with an ethic from lived experiences. Finally, the depths lead to transformation (sixth layer). This learning process could means the series of developmental changes in a single thought, feeling, lesson or moment (Hart 2009).

Like Hart (2009), Freire (1974) recognises that information is at the surface of the learning process, and it is used as currency (which can be transferred) in the banking education. This education is a mere act of depositing: the students are the depositories and teachers are the depositors. Thus, people become a passive depository to fill with content; they are reduced to things, objects (Freire 1974). Furthermore, teachers might also become objects when they are mere depositories for a mandatory curriculum, and so on. This education is developed in opposition to freedom, through dehumanisation and oppression. Moreover, Freire (1974) describes oppression as objectification of people, i.e. their reduction to objects in a materialistic concept of existence.

Although Freire (1974) refers to oppression as external forces that act upon people, placing them into limit-situations, his ideas on freedom are based on humanisation and consciousness, which could only arouse from inside women and men, through the affirmation of their positive freedom. This idea is clear when Freire (1974) argues that the oppressed must accept their total responsibility for the struggle for humanisation, once they realise and accept it.
Moreover he adds that the oppressed must realise that they are fighting not merely for freedom from hunger, but for:

Freedom to create and to construct, to wonder and to venture. Such freedom requires that the individual be active and responsible, not a slave or a well-fed cog in the machine. It is not enough that men are not slaves; if social conditions further the existence of automatons, the result will not be love of life, but love of death. (Fromm in Freire 1974:66)

Freire (1974) refers to the oppressed as those who “have been shaped by the death-affirming climate of oppression” (66), and destroyed precisely because their situation has reduced them to things. However, he argues that: “in order to regain their humanity they must cease to be things and fight as men and women. This is a radical requirement. They cannot enter the struggle as objects in order later to become human beings” (Freire 1974:66). Therefore, education as practice freedom starts from within the individuals, who in the struggle for their humanisation, become more conscious of themselves, others and the world, and engage with the transformation of reality beyond their individual life. Moreover, the humanisation of one unfolds into the humanisation of others through dialogue.

Dialogue is an act of co-creation, an encounter between people, from a horizontal and empathic relationship, in a joint search for understanding, naming and changing the world (Freire 1967). Furthermore, people name the world through words, which are composed mutually by reflection and action. A word deprived of action is pure verbalism, an empty word without meaning and real commitment with the world. Likewise, a word deprived of reflection is activism, which can lead to fanaticism, from the lack of critical thinking and awareness. Thus, a true word is praxis itself and education as practice of freedom is based on naming the world through true words, co-creating meanings.

Therefore, dialogue is not only a process of learning and knowing, based on an ever-present curiosity about the world, but also requires the rupture of vertical relationships based on hierarchy and domination (Freire 1967). These relationships characterise the banking education, in which “the teacher teaches and the students are taught”, “the teacher knows and the students do not know”, “the teacher chooses and the students comply” and “the teacher
confuses the authority of knowledge with his/her own professional authority, which he/she sets in opposition to the student’s freedom” (Freire 1974:73). Thus education is the exercise of domination, with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating people to adapt to conform (Freire 1967).

In opposition, in a liberating education “no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught; people teach each other mediated by the world, by cognizable objects” (Freire 1974:80). Liberating education does not consist in transferrals of information – which is in the surface of the matter (Hart 2009), but in acts of cognition in which the cognizable object (to be studied, discovered and solved) intermediates the cognitive actors (teacher and student). This means that both actors dialogue and work together toward problematizing and solving the world, being jointly responsible for a process in which all grow and develop as human beings. Being responsible requires autonomy, making decisions in response to consciousness and transcending our object position in society (Freire 1996).
The paradox of school education

In this section I problematize the idea of education as practice of freedom within school, presenting divergent perspectives about the role of school in education. These, however, emerge from a common thread, the radical critique of our conventional schooling and the search for alternatives to our dominant system. From the previous discussions on freedom and liberating education, my argument is that the term “school education” represents a paradox, as it raises the question whether education (the practice of freedom) and school can co-exist. I develop the following discussion as a dialogue between these ideas from the assumption that the challenges that one presents to the other are a call for co-creating a common place of freedom.

Deschooling society

True liberation [...] will have to invent educational alternatives which put an end to the “age of schooling”.

(Illich 1970:126)

Illich (1971) takes a radical approach based on the motto “everything must be doubted”, especially the ideological concepts which are virtually shared by everybody, such as school. To doubt, however, does not imply the state of inability to arrive at convictions, but the capacity of critical questioning of all assumptions and institutions, which have become idols under the name of common sense. Furthermore, he describes radical doubt as an act of uncovering and discovering, a process of liberation from idolatrous thinking, a dawning and widening of awareness of our possibilities and options. Yet, radical doubt means to question, not necessarily to negate. Moreover, when Illich speaks on radicalism he means to start from the roots, and “the root is man” (8). In this sense, he defends a humanistic radicalism, which relies on questioning guided by insights into the dynamics of man’s nature and by concerns for man’s growth and full unfolding (Illich 1971).

Illich (1970; 1971) defends a humanistic radicalism based on questioning every idea and institution from the standpoint of whether it helps or hinders man’s capacity for greater aliveness and joy. It is from this standpoint that he questions the usefulness of compulsive schooling, and claims that schooling is
not a viable answer to the need for education. According to him, people are “schooled” to “confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new” (1), hence their imagination is also schooled to accept service in place of value (Illich 1970).

By “school”, of course, I do not mean all organised formal education. I use the term “school” and “schooling” here to designate a form of child care and a rite of passage which we take for granted. We forget that this institution and the corresponding creed appeared on the scene only with the growth of the industrial state. (Illich 1971:110)

Illich speaks on schooling as a conditioning for sustaining our dominant system, expressing his conviction that “the ethos, not just the institutions, of society ought to be deschooled” (Illich 1970:vi). Furthermore, he advocates a disestablishment of school (Illich 1970), not a literal closure of schools. This is clarified by him in two articles published after Deschooling Society, in which he explains that his intention was not to end school, but to liberate education, liberate it from the state and move the control to socially organised grassroots movements (Bruno-Jofré and Zaldíval 2015). In the same articles Illich claims that he advocates the disestablishment of school as an institution in the same sense that the term “disestablishment” is used to talk about the separation of church and state, for example (ibid).

Therefore, Illich’s (1970) radical questioning of school is made within his critique against the institutionalisation of values, which according to him led to physical pollution, social polarisation and psychological impotence – “three dimensions in a process of global degradation and modernised misery” (1). Furthermore, he argues against the principles of hierarchy and meritocracy that sustain schools, and points out the “liberal myth” that schooling is an assurance of social integration (Illich 1971).

This school system has built a narrow bridge across a widening social gap. As the only legitimate passage to the middle class, the school restricts all unconventional crossings and leaves the underachiever to bear the blame for his marginality. (Illich 1971:109)

Likewise, Apple (2011) highlights that in our current school system, a chance to education is given to poor children as a way to achieve individual success – as
long as they fit the pre-set requirements – but not as a way to give them conditions to radically change the structures that create impoverishment in the first place. That also means that dealing with the issue of social and economic inequalities only by offering “equal educational opportunities” is a superficial resolution, given the underlying disadvantaged situation in which some children find themselves. It is in this sense that Illich (1970) claims that “the poor have always been socially powerless” (3) and that schools have sustained inequalities between class, gender and race, assuming the interrelation between these features (Apple 2011).

Kahn (2010), recognises Illich’s enduring contributions in the manner in which he perceived the deep ideological relationships between modern institutions like school, church, factory production, medicine, media and transportations systems as authoritarian and dehumanising elements of an “unchecked industrial society” (94). From these relationships, Illich (1971) advocates freedom as taking a critical attitude toward common-sensical premises that sustain established and unquestionable concepts and ideologies. Moreover, he adds that “our freedom and power are determined by our willingness to accept responsibility for the future” (Illich 1971:17), and suggests alternatives such as learning webs, which would be built upon a network that (surprisingly) resembles our modern Internet – decades before its creation. Illich’s proposal of an educational system is guided by three purposes: “provide all who want to learn with access to available resources at any time in their lives; empower all who want to share what they know to find those who want to learn it from them; and furnish all who want to present an issue to the public with the opportunity to make their challenge known” (75). Furthermore, he believes that based on self-motivation learning people would experience more deeply both their own independence and their need for guidance.

In defence of school

The school must be a place for everyone, a meeting place in the physical and also the social, cultural and political sense of the world. A site for meeting and relating, where children and adults meet and commit to something, where they can dialogue…in order to share meanings. […] A place for ethical and political
praxis, [...] for democratic leaning. A place for research and creativity, coexistence and pleasure, critical thought and emancipation.

(Associación de Mestres Rosa Sensat in Fielding and Moss 2011:87)

Fielding and Moss (2011) write in defence of school, understanding it as a public institution and public space, a “place of encounter, a collaborative workshop, a personal-centred learning community and a place of democratic fellowship” (87). The authors write a proposal of a common school, which is open to all citizens living in the local area, regardless their age. Moreover, a common school practices a democratic radical education, which aims to promote values and ethics such as democracy, social justice, political justice and solidarity (Fielding and Moss 2011). They adopted the term radical education in order to make reference to the fundamental concept of radical, which means “going to the roots of the matter” (40), toward a deep change – in contrast with conformity and superficial change.

Moreover, Fielding and Moss (2011) refer to school as “the only public institution to which nearly everyone is affiliated for a sustained period during part of their lives, whether as a child or parent” (89). They build their arguments against the abandonment and de-institutionalisation (even dismantling) of schools due to a multitude of learning networks as part of an emergent “network society” (Fielding and Moss 2011), which has been driven by a reduction of costs with education.

Likewise, Masschelein and Simons (2012) believe that “it is precisely today – at a time when many condemn the school as maladjusted to modern reality and even seem to want to abandon it altogether – that what the school is and does becomes clear” (9). For the authors, school is a historical invention and can, therefore, disappear. On the other hand, this also means that it can (and must) be reinvented (Masschelein and Simons 2012). Although Fielding and Moss (2011) recognise the potentially dangerous nature of school as a place of incessant surveillance and intensifying governing of children and their teachers, they argue for an alternative, a common school through radical education.

In the same manner, although Freire largely criticizes traditional schools, he believes in the democratic potential of school (Streck et al. 2012). When he was the head of the Department of Education of São Paulo city in 1989, he and his team implemented the Citizen School project.

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Citizen school [...] cannot be citizen school in itself and for itself. It is a citizen school in the same measure as it exercises the construction of the citizenship of those who use its space. It is a school coherent with freedom. It is coherent with its educational, liberating discourse. It is a school that, as it struggles to be itself, fights for the educatees-educators to also be themselves. And, as nobody can be alone, the Citizen School is a community school. (Freire in Streck et al. 2012)

Therefore, Freire’s ideas of liberating education were elaborated within the school context. However, the authors presented here defend not only school, but also (and especially) the need for it to be radically changed in order to become a real place for dialogue, questioning, co-creation, democratic decision-making and engagement with the community and the reality within and beyond school.

Deschooling school

It would be very wrong to see schools as other than ‘society’.
(Apple 2011:26)

Within the presented paradox of school education, it seems fundamental to acknowledge schools as society itself. Apple (2011) challenges the conception of society as something apart from us, as an unwieldy, unachievable and unchangeable condition in order to encourage a shift in the way we conceive society. This shift is made through the problematization of society – and of school – realising it as a limiting-situation, which, in its turn, must be changed. Furthermore, once schools are understood and practiced as society itself, they not only reproduce but also challenge the whole system and its current relations of dominance and subordination (oppression).

From this perspective, if school is society, what would happen if we deschool society? What would be left for us? The answer might bring us closer to the roots of what education and freedom means – once practiced in their full potential. In the same way, we can also ask what would happen if we deschool schools? These questions not only make evident the existing paradox within the discussed concepts, but also invite us to dream, co-create and engage with new alternatives towards transformation.
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

In this chapter I explore the case study methodology and describe the method used to conduct this research. In the first section, I briefly discuss the nature of a research based on qualitative data and interpretative analysis. Following, I discuss the case study approach in order to justify its adoption and build a theoretical foundation for the method developed. Furthermore, I contextualize this research within a theoretical and empirical field, giving some examples of other research developed based on similar aims and methods.

In the second section, I present a description of the method developed, based on the methodology discussed beforehand. The intention is to explain the procedure of this research, give support to its implementation in future studies and encourage a reflexive and active research based on direct experiences within different contexts.
METHODOLOGY

Firstly, it is important to recognise that any research, as a human and social activity, carries a set of values, beliefs and interests of the researcher, which always influence the study in certain extent (Lüdke and André 1968). Likewise, Creswell (2007) argues that researchers bring their own worldviews to the research and that these assumptions, paradigms and frameworks should be explicit in the writing of the study, acknowledging their influences on the conduct of the inquiry. The author particularly refers to qualitative research, in which the researcher uses interpretive and theoretical frameworks to further shape the study. For this reason, a qualitative research might also be referred to as interpretative.

Dowling and Brown (2010) distinguish qualitative from quantitative approach in regard to the research analysis. According to them, a quantitative approach is often associated with objective forms of enquiry concerned with the search for facts, while the latter is carried out in an interpretative frame concerned with the production of meaning. Moreover, a qualitative approach does not intend to separate the observer from the world; rather, it relies on a set of interpretative materials that make the world visible by the human records and representations (Creswell 2007). Likewise, in this research I develop a qualitative approach recognizing that the concept in question (education as practice of freedom) could not be separated from people’s experiences and representations of the world.

Within the qualitative approach, Creswell (2007) describes the case study as a methodology with the intent to understand an issue or problem using a case as specific illustration. According to him, this type of research “involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system – a setting or context” (73). Similarly, Yin (2003) defines case study as an empirical enquiry that investigates a phenomenon in-depth and within its real-life context. This methodology is appropriate when the boundaries between phenomenon (issue or problem) and context are not clearly evident (Yin 2003), or when the researcher has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases (Creswell 2007). Another possibility is to conduct a comparison of several cases in regard to the same problem (ibid). In
this case, the context to be investigated is chosen based on the assumption that it is relevant to the phenomenon of interest.

The validity of the research depends on the relationship between theoretical concepts and empirical indicator variables, and its reliability relies on the consistency of a coding process when applied in different contexts (Dowling and Brown 2010). In a case study, the analysis should sustain the validity and reliability of the research through the connection between findings and its thematic to theoretical evidences (Creswell 2007). Moreover, the findings rely on an in-depth data collection, which involves multiple sources of information, such as observations, interviews, documents and audiovisual materials (ibid).

From the typically extensive data collection, a detailed description of the case can be given as part of the analysis, covering aspects as the history of the case, the chronology of events, or a day-by-day rendering of activities (Creswell 2007). After this descriptive section, the researcher might focus on a few key issues (themes), not for generalizing beyond the case, but for understanding the complexity of the case (ibid). A strategy for analysis is to identify issues within each case and then look for common themes that transcend the cases (Yin, 2003). Another format in regard to multiple cases is to first provide a detailed description of each case and themes within the cases (within-case analysis), followed by a thematic analysis across the cases (cross-case analysis), as well as discussions and interpretations of the meaning of the case (Creswell 2007). In the final interpretive phase, the researcher expresses the meaning of the case, whether it comes from learning about the issue of the case (instrumental case) or about an unusual situation (intrinsic case).

Although the focus on cases allows an in depth understanding of the bounded system studied, it can be hard to have enough information to present an in-depth picture of the case (Creswell 2007). Another limitation of the case study approach, according to Marshall and Rossman (2014), is the loss of important details and different perceptions due to its reliance on descriptive information provided by the researcher and participants. Moreover, a bounded system is not representative of a certain population and, thus, cannot be used in term of generalization, as highlighted by Creswell (2007).

By acknowledging both the potentials and limitations of the case study research, I chose to develop this methodology in order to investigate the
concept of *education as practice of freedom* (Freire 1967), based on two schools of interest (bounded systems). In other words, this case study is a collective within-site and intrinsic case study, aiming to explore the practices of these schools in relation to the development of a *liberating education*. Based on the concept of interest, I chose the schools as intrinsic cases to study due to their innovative practices (unique situations). Moreover, I develop a cross-case analysis, based primarily on themes that represent essential principles of *education as practice of freedom*.

The search for similar studies showed a large amount of case studies in regard to democratic practices, student voice and citizenship education within schools. Although these themes could be related to *liberating education*, the focus of these studies has shown to be different from the focus of this study. Several of them were instrumental case studies, focused on an issue or concern, such as a student voice project (Robinson and Taylor 2012). Moreover, the schools studied were not selected based on their intrinsic value, as the focus of the research was a specific program, rather than the school as a whole (setting). This approach led to findings such as that the student voice project and other practices within schools can be silos, inconsistent with the whole structure and dynamic of the school (Lanahan and Phillips 2014; Robinson and Taylor 2012). This means that, despite the intention to “empower the students”, the projects were constrained by the power relations underpinning the dominant norms and processes that already exist in the schools.

These studies not only lead to the question whether empowerment can be done within school practice, but also indicate the necessity to look for innovative schools as intrinsic cases that are in coherence with the valued principles, in order to explore real alternatives to the identified issues. This was the approach adopted by the authors of the books “*Democratic schools*” (Apple 1997), “*Real School*” (Gribble 1998), “*Rethinking Citizenship Education*” (McCowan 2009), “*Around the world in thirteen schools*” (Coletivo Educ-ação 2013), among others. I came across these books throughout my search for innovative and inspiring schools, and they became a reference for this research. Furthermore, a case study on *liberating education* was developed by Taylor (1934) in a school on the island of Santa Maria, Guatemala. His work was written in a
narrative format and was developed throughout many years, giving detailed information about the context and stories of the place.

In conclusion, although many case studies were developed to investigate both specific projects and schools in regard to concepts that could be related to liberating education, this research attempts to present an original proposal, combining theoretical concepts of liberating education with innovative school practices and developing an analysis based on themes that represent key principles of the theory of interest.

METHOD

This research emerged from my interest to learn from non-conventional schools, in order to set up a learning community with people. From this interest, I have searched for innovative schools around the world and visited some of them in Brazil, England and Portugal. Although these schools are known by different terminologies – democratic, free, progressive, alternative, humanistic, constructivist – all of them are run differently from the mainstream schools, (banking schools). In opposition to a banking education, Freire defends education as practice of freedom and refers to progressive schools as those concerned with the autonomy of the students and based on principles such as dialogue, problematization and engagement with the world. In this sense, I assume that, despite the different terminologies, these schools could demonstrate practices of these principles. From this assumption, I started my research aiming to explore the practices of these schools in relation to education as practice of freedom.

Sampling

The two schools chosen as case studies for this research were described in the book Around The World in Thirteen Schools (Coletivo Educ-ação 2013) as innovative and inspiring schools. Both of them are located in São Paulo city, my hometown, and are commonly known by their unique practices. Firstly it is
important to clarify that both schools preferred not to be anonymous, allowing me to mention their names and share their stories in this research. Politeia is a democratic school where the (twenty-eight) students, along with the educators, decide the rules of coexistence and the themes to be studied. The school has primary and secondary education, however, the students are not divided by age or grades. CIEJA Campo Limpo is a school for people over fifteen years old (including youth, adults and elderly) who have not completed their basic school education. The school is open to the community and it is known by its inclusiveness and adult literacy program. Although both schools share similar principles, they are inserted in very different contexts and are run in very different ways (more information about the schools is presented in Chapter 3).

Acknowledging their particular practices, I chose these two schools as case studies for this research through a *purposeful* and *opportunistic* sampling (Creswell 2007; Dowling and Brown 2009). I contacted a few schools of interest by telephone to explain briefly the aim of the research and Politeia and CIEJA were the ones that demonstrated interest, availability and openness to engage in this study. After my first contact with the schools, I sent them an email with more details about the research, including the written project and authorization letters, which they replied arranging a day for us to meet and discuss about the data collection.

### Data Collection

The research was conducted over the course of a one-month stay in Brazil, from which I spent a total of six days non consecutive and a minimum of five hours a day in each school. During half of the research period I was accompanied by my partner, a videographer, who conducted the audio and video recordings with appropriate equipment. The first day in each school was dedicated to discuss the research, be introduced to people and get familiar with the environment. Some points discussed were the anonymity of the school and people – which was dismissed by the schools – the data collection, and publication of the research. The schools gave permission for starting the study and we arranged the next days.

In Politeia, the data collection started on the second day, after introducing ourselves to the students in the opening circle, which is a regular practice in the
school. In that moment, I explained the study and data collection, responded to
the students’ questions and checked who did not wanted to participate in the
study – these students were not filmed or interviewed during the research. In
CIEJA, the data collection started on the first day after talking to the head-
teacher, who gave permission to start filming immediately, as all students and
staff in the school had already signed permission for the use of their images
beforehand – a regular practice in the state schools.

In both schools the interviews and recordings were done according to people’s
availability and agreement, through dialogue with the individuals. There were no
specific criteria for selecting people for interviews, as the intention was to gather
a non-bias randomized representation of the school. However, in some
occasions people were invited for an interview in regard to their participation in
an interesting episode, based on which I asked further explanations about their
statements and opinions. The interviews were unstructured and open-ended
(Creswell 2007), generally aiming to collect extensive and in-depth information
about the school – its structure, organization, assessment, curriculum, decision-
making etc – and about specific episodes that occurred during the research. All
interviews were recorded in video and some of them were transcribed according
to their relevance for the discussion in the analysis.

An extensive array of data was collected through long filming periods, which
could capture the school dynamics and give an illustration of occasional
discussions and episodes. The intention was to explore all the spaces of the
schools and to interact with as many people as possible, with their permission
and least disturbance to their daily activities. In addition, a small camera was
given to Politeia’s students who showed interest in filmmaking, as a way to
integrate them in the research process and collect data though different
perspectives. Some transcripts of interviews, discussions and episodes follow in
the attachment of this study. Furthermore, all pictures, video and audio
recordings were stored (unedited) in a hard drive, and given to the schools at
the end of the research, as agreed beforehand.

In addition to the video and audio recordings, a field notebook was used to
register observations, reflections and organise ideas for further analysis. Field
notes were gathered by conducting observations as an observer in certain
moments and as a participant in others (Creswell 2007). Other sources of data
were official documents of the schools (such as their political pedagogical projects), materials used during activities, posters fixed on the walls, and information from the schools’ websites. The documents and other materials were provided by the head-teacher (in CIEJA) and educators, and the posters were photographed for later visualization.

**Analysis**

The process of analysis started along with the data collection, based on the direct experiences within the schools. Throughout these experiences, I registered personal reflections and key concepts in a field notebook, in order to access them later, during the writing process of this work. In addition, at the end of each day within the schools, I saved the digital material recorded (usually three hours of recording per day) into folders with the correspondent dates. While organising the folders, I watched some of the footage and started to mark the files containing interesting points for further analysis.

The writing process of the analysis started with an overall description of the schools (*Section 1*), which was built mainly from direct observations and diverse information given by people, usually during non-recorded conversations. In this part of the work I attempted to compose an introduction of each school, as a base for the second part of the analysis. This format was adopted in accordance with Creswell’s (2007) descriptions of the analysis procedure in a case study research, starting from a detailed description of the cases’ setting and moving to a theme-based analysis (*Section 2*).

Before writing the *Section 2* of the analysis, I looked through all the digital recordings, coding the files with key words to identify interesting points for the discussion (meaningful segments). Most of these segments were selected based on my field notes, containing statements, discussions and situations that had caught my attention during my experience in the schools. I made a list with these excerpts and wrote key points about each of them in related to theoretical concepts about *liberating education*. Within the diverse material collected, I usually looked for *problematizing situations*, which brought me questions and/or insights about how *education as practice of freedom* could be developed within the schools. These issues were converted into topics, which are represented in the analysis within the broader themes.
The definition of the themes for the second part of the analysis was made through the relation between the theory of *education as practice of freedom* and the issues highlighted from the data collected. Based on the readings on *liberating education* from Freire, I identified a range of key principles, such as dialogue, conscientização, problematization, critical thinking, emancipation, empowerment, love, autonomy, solidarity and others. I tried a few combinations of four or five themes and tested how the issues that I had selected could be adapted to them. After several reformulations, I realised that some of these concepts were harder to identify and assess through observations in a short period of time, so I reduced the list to concepts that could be easier to recognise based on certain criteria.

After trying different combinations, four themes were selected: *dialogue, problematization, autonomy and engagement*. According to Freire’s ideas, each of these themes is a practice of freedom itself. Moreover, all the other concepts could be covered from them. Love is an essential part of dialogue, critical thinking is developed through problematization, conscientização defines autonomy, and emancipation is developed through engagement and intervention in reality. Each of these themes corresponds to a section in the second part of the analysis, and each section begins with the definition of the concept (theme), followed by the criteria used to identify it within the cases.

After defining the four main themes, I looked to the issues identified and related them to one or more themes. In some occasions, a single episode was divided into parts, and discussed differently according to each theme. Furthermore, I chose to discuss two ideas (sub-themes) within each theme, which were also named according to key ideas discussed by Freire. However, due to limitations of this work, I chose to refer to CIEJA Campo Limpo as a complementary case, from which I draw some elements in contrast to Politeia, aiming to complement ideas and compose a diverse framework. For this reason, CIEJA is discussed generally within each theme. The intent of this cross-case analysis is not to compare the two schools, but to recognise their unique contexts, stories, people and practices. Therefore, relating these two perspectives is interesting for composing a rich understanding of the possibilities of practices, in different contexts and formats.
Moreover, the analysis was developed along with the discussion, as the interpretation of the excerpts required an in-depth discussion of the ideas. On the other hand, a chapter with reflections were developed in order to conclude the work, remembering the research question and aim, and expressing what was learnt about the object of study itself and the research process.
CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I analyse the data gathered throughout my experience in the schools studied, in order to create a dialogue between theory and practice in regard to education as practice of freedom. My aim is to explore how liberating education can be practiced, identifying and exploring elements from the schools’ practices that contribute to the understanding of the core ideas discussed. In other words, I intend to discuss both the possibilities and challenges to the development of education as practice of freedom within school, based on the data collected.

This chapter is divided into two sections: “The schools” and “Themes of freedom”. In the first section I give a general picture of each school, from which I build a basis to collect elements for deeper analysis and further discussion in the next section. The information presented in Section 1 comes from my experiences in the schools, especially from non-recorded conversations with people. The second section is organized into four themes, which I consider to be key principles of education as the practice freedom: dialogue, problematization, autonomy, and engagement. These themes are discussed based on the data collected through direct observation, interviews and written documents. In an attempt to present the data in a clear format, the observations made without recording are presented as part of the text, while all the data recorded, from interviews and discussions, are presented as quotes.

It is important to recognise that the themes represent only one possible way (among many others) to organize the data. In addition, although the themes overlap, they facilitate a critical and sensitive reflection around key concepts. Therefore, the organisation into themes aims to help focus on some aspects of the discussion, and lead to a fuller understanding of education as practice of freedom in its ever-going dialogue between theory and practice.
SECTION 1: THE SCHOOLS

Politeia Democratic School

Politeia is a private school founded in 2009 and located in a central neighbourhood in São Paulo city. It started when some teachers and parents decided to separate from another democratic school called Lumiar, due to growing ideological divergences, with the intent to create an alternative educational project. Lumiar was the first democratic school founded in Brazil in 2003, by an entrepreneur who raised funds from its company to sustain part of the project. After leaving Lumiar, the group of parents and teachers discovered a primary school with similar interests, from where the first six students of Politeia came from. At that point, Politeia intended to run as an extension of this school, offering only secondary education. However, nowadays the two schools (located a few meters from each other) run separately, both with primary and secondary education.

Politeia is known for its democratic approach, which includes the students’ participation in the constant (re)construction of the school curriculum. The students also participate directly in the creation of rules and decisions about actions to be taken. According to the International Democratic Education Network (IDEN), a democratic school requires that teachers and students have an equal vote in the decisions about their learning and their social lives.

The school’s activities are run in a rented house with eight rooms and an open space with covered and uncovered parts, beside the kitchen and toilets. Next to the front door, there is a child’s painting on the wall depicting a girl in a red dress searching a policeman with his hands up, as well as a poster written in a child’s handwriting “Politeia community supports the strike of the teachers that are in struggle”. Inside the school the atmosphere is of a family house: children running around, playing, drawing, reading, Figure 1. Painting in the front door of the school.
writing, using the computers and talking to other children and adults throughout the day.

The front door is a white bar gate with a doorbell, through which the inside and outside of the school communicate. Next to the door there is a big window that leads to a room used as the office, which is also used by the students to talk to the educators (the title adopted instead of teacher), use the computer and do some activities, frequently sitting on the floor. To illustrate the dynamic of the school, the first time I called them, a child answered the phone and said “Hi! They cannot talk now, bye!” and hung up. I called back a few minutes later and an educator answered in a kind manner, expressing support and interest in my research. That was my first contact with the school and the beginning of our dialogue.

At the present moment, Politeia has a total of twenty-eight students from six to fifteen years old on roll, primarily from middle and upper-middle class families. All students share the same spaces and participate in the same activities in the school, not being divided according to their age or ability, into years or sets. On the other hand, the school is organized into practices that are fulfilled in different ways, based on specific objectives and proposals. In total there are thirteen educators and two staff who are responsible for cooking and doing most of the cleaning. The educators participate in the practices through different roles, yet every role involves continual dialogue with the children. Overall information about the practices is given later in this section, and the dialogical relation between students and educators is explored within the theme Dialogue in Section 2.

Although one of the educators is officially registered as the head-teacher of the school, in practice this role is not taken by any educator; instead they take in turns the administrative responsibilities. Besides the role of management and administration, the educators play different roles in the school, six of them as tutors and seven as specialists. The tutors are the ones who build closer relationships with the students within three tutorial groups. There are two tutors for each tutorial group; one of them works five days a week, while the other works three. Differently, the specialists work usually twice a week and two hours a day, with the same group of students from the tutorials, but in regard to the specific areas of knowledge. Although the school presents an average of more
than two educators per student, the educators are not all present at the same
time, except when they meet once a week after school to reflect on and discuss
issues that occurred during the week, and plan future actions.

The school period starts at 1pm and goes until 6pm, from Monday to Friday. Although there is no bell to control time, students and educators still follow a
timetable written on a big panel in the entrance room. Moreover, the school is
organised into ten different practices:

1- **Opening circle**: happens everyday during the initial fifteen minutes of the
school activities. Its purpose is to gather all the students and educators in
a circle to remember the timetable of the day and talk briefly about the
next activities. It is also a moment to give notices and organize the
groups in the spaces.

2- **School meeting [assembleia]**: is a time when all students, educators and
staff gather in a circle to discuss and make decisions in regard to the
school community. It is a moment for creating collective rules regarding
the schoolwork, the use of the space and materials, and social relations;
proposing ways to solve problems that affects the community and plan
actions. The topics discussed come directly from a panel placed in the
corridor, on which anyone from the school can write. The meetings
happen every Monday after the open circle.

3- **Tutorials**: are organized in three groups with nine or ten students and two
tutors each. This year the groups were created by the educators, taking
into consideration the students’ age (up to four years apart) and their
relationships. Each group has an animal name, which was given by the
students: fire salamander, platypus and axolotl. The purpose of the
tutorials is to integrate the students into the school community though
informal talks and support activities that vary according to the group
needs. Usually, tutorials occur twice a week, and every meeting is one
hour in-length.
4- **Research orientation:** a session for students to develop individual research based on any theme or question of their interest. Each educator orients four or five students, meeting them once a week. The students develop a research project every six months, presenting it at three different times throughout this period.

5- **Study groups:** are groups for studying specific themes, which are proposed by the students and educators in the beginning of the year. Each study group is guided by one educator and contains a variable number of students, depending on subscriptions. The students choose three out of eight study groups, according to their interests. Each group meets once a week over three months.

6- **Atelier:** is a time to develop the languages of Portuguese, Mathematics, and English. It happens twice a week, usually within the tutorial groups, and it is guided by specialists in these areas of knowledge.

7- **Laboratories:** happen four times a week to explore the school spaces and different activities without a need for continuity. Both educators and students can propose activities for these moments. The proposals can be occasional or fixed to specific dates, such as the laboratory of Arts, which is open every week. The activities are flexible, and depend on the availability of educators, needs and interests of the ones involved.
8- *Commissions:* gather once a week, and are concerned with the management of some practices and events that are important for the school organization, such as meals, cleaning and recycling. There is one educator in each commission and the students take turns in all of them, moving from one to another every month.

9- *Forums:* can be convened both by students and educators when there is an inter-personal conflict. They are facilitated by an educator, through a process of restorative justice, with the participation of other students.

10- *School Council:* happens once every two months, with the intent to gather all the school community to discuss and make decisions regarding the school life. Usually, educators and student’s parents are the ones who attend the meetings.

Politeia often develops some of these activities in the park next to the school, and also organizes trips to cultural, political and entertainment spaces outside the school, depending on the students’ interests and relation with the themes studied in the groups. These practices are explored further in *Section 2*, according to their relations with principles of liberating education.
CIEJA Campo Limo

CIEJAs are Integrated Centres of Education of Youths and Adults [Centro Integrado de Educação de Jovens e Adultos], directed to youth and adults who dropped out of school or had never studied in one. The centres are maintained by the government of São Paulo city as a state school. However, they run differently from regular schools, as they offer a specific programme to assist people to complete their school education out of the “expected” time. Nowadays there are seven CIEJAs in São Paulo, among which CIEJA Campo Limpo is known by its particular practices of inclusion, work based on problem-situations and engagement with the community.

CIEJAs can give a certificate of completion of secondary education in four years time to those who have never studied in a school before. This diploma gives legal support for people to continue their studies in a high school or university. However, the time that people spend in CIEJA depends on their level of literacy, previous school education, learning process and interest. While some students spend one month at the school just to finish their degree, others stay there for eight years by their own choice.

The creation of centres focused on youth and adult education is a result of the influence of Paulo Freire’s work on adult literacy, started in the 1960’s. Freire brought attention to the issue of adult illiteracy, recognising it as a process of empowerment, essential to the dialogue and engagement with the world. The CIEJAs ware built from the old project CEME, Municipal Centres of Suppletive Education [Centros Municipais de Ensino Supletivo], based on pedagogical changes in the programme in 2001. CIEJA’s project was elaborated looking for more dialogue between teachers and students and more assistance to the individuals’ learning process.

Eda, the head-teacher of CIEJA Campo Limpo, works in the school since 1997, when it was still a CEME running in a different building in the area. In 1999 the centre moved to the current house, and two years later it was converted into a CIEJA, where Eda has been the head-teacher since then. She was also the responsible for writing the official project of CIEJA in 2006, when the new government of São Paulo threatened to close the centres. At that point, the school got the attention of the secretary of education by protesting on a national
TV channel, an episode that I describe in Section 2 as an example of engagement of the community.

Campo Limpo is the region where this CIEJA is set up, in the South-west of São Paulo, within the district of Capão Redondo, a peripheral area commonly known by its high levels of poverty and violence. This area is occupied by a large *favela* [slum], where most of the students live. From the school court it is possible to see the line that separates the *favela* from a middle-class condominium, which is a representative illustration of the enormous social and economical inequality existing in Brazil.

![Figure 3. View from the school court.](image)

Although CIEJA Campo Limpo has more than 1250 students, it preserves a friendly atmosphere and sense of community. It is run in a big house with many posters on the walls with statements such as “*the right change makes a big difference*” and a representation of the school’s values: love, well-being, respect, responsibility, trust, care, teach, learn, transformation, freedom and joy. CIEJA has eleven classrooms, a library, a computer room, a refectory, a radio room, a court, an office, a teacher’s room, a special needs room and several open spaces. The school dynamic is very busy, with people coming and leaving constantly during the day. Moreover, CIEJA Campo Limpo is known by keeping its doors always open during the school hours, from 7am to 10.30pm in the weeks and from 8am to 12pm on Saturdays, so anyone can come in and out at any time, which many people from the community do everyday, including people who do not study there. When we got inside the school through the open
door, we found Eda and she took us on a walk for hours, showing every corner of the school, introducing us to people on the way and offering cake, coffee and later, lunch. She said “here, there is always food for everyone”, and added that everyday people from the community come to eat. Later, I discovered a few cases of students who used to go to CIEJA for having food and ended up studying there, after getting closer to the students, teachers and head-teacher during the meals, when everyone eats together. Moreover, anyone can use the computers, go to the library and even attend classes, if they wish. This is what defines CIEJA Campo Limpo as a truly open community centre, which welcomes and gives assistance to everyone who arrives there.

Differently from child’s education, the students of CIEJA have chosen to be there, as they are interested in learning to read and write and/or finish their school education. They have left (or never had) school education for diverse reasons, such as lack of motivation or interest, need for working and financial sustainability, suffering from a disability (physical and/or cognitive), “misbehaving” in their previous schools, among others. Some students left school by choice, others by exclusion, and others never had an opportunity to go to school. In CIEJA, new students can be registered and start studying immediately, by presenting an ID and a document from a previous school (if they have one). During the registration they also take a diagnostic evaluation for probing their level of literacy. One of the questions in the form is “what is your dream?” which serves as motivation both for students and teachers.

Through the diagnostic evaluation the student is registered in one of the four modules, according to their level of literacy and/or previous degree. CIEJAs can only take students over fifteen-years-old, but there is no upper age limit, which means that a fifteen-year-old and an eighty-year-old student can be in the same module, sharing the same table during classes. All classrooms are arranged in groups of four to five people and the number of classes of each module varies according to the student’s demand. This year, there are a total of 66 classes, each of them with a maximum of twenty students. This high number of classes and students is viable due to the organization of the school day into six periods, each of them with two and a half hours – the first at 7.30am and the latest at 8pm. The students study only for one period and complete “extra-class
activities” outside the school in order to fulfil the requirement of 5 hours of schoolwork per day.

The students have several options of time slots to choose from, so they can go to school in a period that attend their needs. Moreover, this flexibility is important for the inclusion of a larger number of students who work. CIEJA offers at least one class of each module in every period. This year there is one class of module I, two classes of module II, four classes of module III and four classes of module IV in every school period, which sums to eleven classes by period and sixty-six classes in a single school day.

The four modules are: Literacy (I), Post-literacy (II), Intermediary (III) and Final module (IV). The first module works with illiterate students, developing literacy from its initial stages, and the second is a continuity of the literacy process with those that read and write with difficulty. In the third and fourth modules, the students read and write fluently and start to study within the areas of knowledge: Languages and Codes (LC), Logical and Artistic Studies (LAS), Sciences of Thought (ST) and Human Sciences (HS).

Each area of knowledge is a combination of two Subjects: Portuguese and English (LC); Arts and Mathematics (LAS); Science and Philosophy (ST); History and Geography (HS). Although each module lasts one year, the students spend more or less time in the modules depending on their development and previous education. Moreover, the decision to move from one module to the other is made by the student and teachers together during an assessment meeting.

Figure 4. Class in Module I. On the board: “the personal transformation requires the substitution of old habits for new ones.”
While in modules I and II, each class has a single teacher who works with them everyday throughout the year, in modules III and IV, there are two teachers per area of knowledge, who work together in the classroom. The teachers of the same area of knowledge work together both planning and developing the class activities. Furthermore, all Fridays are reserved for collective planning within the areas of knowledge and for meetings with all teachers. At these days, there are no classes, however the students can still go to school to get support with their personal studies. In modules III and IV, the students study one area of knowledge at a time during a cycle, which lasts one month and a half. In every semester, the group of students study the four areas of knowledge, taking them in turns. Furthermore, at the end of each cycle, the students and their teachers make a presentation to the rest of the school.

In addition to the formal classes, permanent activities are developed throughout the year in different formats, such as Indigenous Meeting, Festival of Culture, Animal Day, Community Lunch, Afro Seminar, Literary Contest, Gender and Diversity, Youth Talk and Action of Intervention in the Community. The school is also a space for supporting other projects within the community, such as the TV Doc Capão, an alternative media that shows the beauties of the neighbourhood, and the Dream Project that supports drug addicts, which play an important role in the social emancipation of the community.
SECTION 2: THEMES OF FREEDOM

This section is organized into four core themes within liberating education, aiming to analyse the schools’ practices in relation to them. The themes are: Dialogue, Problematization, Autonomy and Engagement. Although each of them is a practice of freedom in itself, they are intrinsically connected to each other, in a mutual relationship. Moreover, despite their overlapping, I discuss each theme separately in an attempt to systematize the data and guide the understanding of the concepts. However, a single episode or statement might serve as a point for discussion within more than one theme, though from a different perspective. Thus, it is important to recognise the subjectivity of the following analysis, in regard to other possible themes and combinations.

The sequence in which the themes are presented intends to assist the flow of ideas, moving from an inter-personal to a broader social perspective: dialogue is the force that drives problematization; problematization is a requirement for the rise of knowledge and autonomy; autonomy is developed in engagement with the world; and engagement with reality is an act of intervention, of transformation in a broader context. Therefore, these themes contribute to the understanding of liberation at different levels, as each of them is both a practice of freedom in itself and a step towards a whole free system. Moreover, the threads connecting the themes intend to express a continuous process of becoming.

Figure 5. Representation of the relationship between the four themes.
THEME 1: DIALOGUE

To speak a true word is to transform the world.

(Freire, 1974:87)

Freire (1974) argues that dialogue is an act of co-creation of reality and an expression of profound love for the world and for people. It is an encounter between men and women to name the world and transform it (Freire 1974). The word, the essence of dialogue, consists of two dimensions, reflection and action, which are deeply interrelated. If one of these dimensions is sacrificed, true dialogue does not exist. Therefore, true dialogue is action-reflection (praxis), built through true words, which require love, humility, faith, hope and critical thinking from those who meet in order to transform the world (Freire, 1974).

Within this theme, I present conversations and school practices that express a potential for dialogue. However, it is important to spell out that dialogue is not the same as conversation, as a true dialogue only exists in the conditions presented above, which cannot easily be identified and analysed. Therefore, I selected the following topics for analysis based on the concept of action-reflection, looking for situations in which people expressed a reflection in regard to a concrete action within the school.
POLITEIA

Deciding what to dialogue about

In liberating education, dialogue begins with the encounter between people to decide what they will dialogue about – the content of dialogue. In a school context, the content of dialogue is also the content of the school curriculum, which is not merely a set of contents, but a set of knowledge that indicates “what is learned and taught” in school, as suggested by Moore (2015). Moreover, knowledge, understood as what “is known”, includes all values, attitudes, skills and contents that are learned.

In Politeia, students and educators dialogue about what to learn and teach throughout the development of several activities. The agenda for each meeting is created collectively and is, in itself, part of the curriculum. Some themes extracted from the agenda are: “circus silk”, “bringing animals”, “rule of lending”, “use of the Science room”, “earn money”, “people outside the meeting”, “food in the park”, “use of toys” and “go to protest”. These represent what students and educators dialogue about in the meetings.

The study groups are also a practice of co-creation of the curriculum. The themes studied are suggested at the beginning of the year by the students and educators through a range of activities. The group makes an extensive list of themes, from which the study groups are defined every three months through a dialogue around the themes, followed by a vote from the students. The study groups developed between February and April 2015 were: “The beginning of things”, “When will the water end?”, “Explosions”, “Cartoons”, “War History”, “São Paulo History”, “Juggling” and “Physics”. In April, the selection of themes for the next study groups was made through an activity in which the theme options were put into posters, and the students wrote what they wanted to learn about each of them, sometimes guided by an educator. Next, I present some examples of themes accompanied by the students’ notes:
By looking to the themes, it is hard to tell which of them were proposed by educators, and which were proposed by students. In Politeia “what is learned and taught” is not imposed by someone, but defined collectively through a dialogical process, which is a fundamental step for overcoming the teacher-student contradiction, as I discuss in the following passage. Moreover, the ability to ask questions, essential to humanisation, is explored further within Problematization.
Overcoming the teacher-student contradiction

Liberating education must begin with overcoming the teacher-student contradiction, “by reconciling the poles of contradiction so that both are simultaneously teacher and students” (Freire 1974:72). This means that the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches and the student is no longer the-one-who-is-taught, instead both teach and are taught mutually (Freire 1974). Although in Politeia educators and students play different roles at most times, both contribute to the learning process and development of the school. Especially during the meetings, teachers and students reflect on practical issues in order to plan and evaluate actions within the school, which is characteristic of dialogue as action-reflection. An interesting example was a student’s (Aliya) request to sell her used things within the school for buying an iPhone with the money raised. Below, I present some excerpts of the meeting discussion in order to illustrate potentials and challenges to overcome the teacher-student contradiction:

Carol (educator): You could do that in a website and share it with people here to see if they are interested.
Luisa (student): If the sale is allowed, she can bring something [to sell] and communicate at least in the opening circle or meeting.
Aliya (student): I could also give part of the money to the school, as I’m selling here.
Yvan (educator): If “I” bring something to sell with the assumption that some children have money, and others do not, “I” create a differentiation within the collective: children that can buy and children that cannot buy. I think this is very bad.
Aliya: What if we make a week for testing? I will send an email to the parents today, saying the days that I will sell things. Then the parents give money to the children. I thought about bringing something tomorrow already. […]
Osvaldo (educator and mediator): The theme is “earning money in the school”. The question is “can we sell things in the school?” Are we going to create a rule that goes for all, or are we going to decide case by case?
[The group voted for creating a general rule]
Carol: I have a forwarding proposal, to create a commission to think about what this general rule would be, and then bring it to the next meeting to see if the group approves it.
Aliya: I don’t think we should do that because we are many weeks late [in the agenda]. I have a rule proposal: to send an email one day before bringing the things to sell and, during a Laboratory, to separate a bit [of the money] for the school.
Yvan: Aliya, I think you can participate in the commission, gather ideas with other people. Otherwise it is going to be yes or no, and I think that with an organized commission we can get an intermediate proposal. If we decide now, because of the tiredness, the no will win, and it will look like a prohibition. […] I’m trying to talk directly to Aliya, for her to withdraw her proposal and create an interesting proposal with the commission.
Osvaldo: But wait, she is against it. We can’t keep trying to convince her. We need to decide the forwarding proposal. Otherwise we are being authoritarian. Let’s vote now: to create or not a commission?
[The group voted for creating a commission]
[Students registered for joining in]

Throughout this episode, the divergences between educators’ and students’ opinions and interests become evident. In this context, divergences seem to be both an opportunity and a challenge for dialogue, democratic decision-making and collective action. In the same manner, Politeia seems to both challenge the student-teacher contradiction and be challenged by it. Moreover, in this dynamic the role of a mediator proved to be fundamental for the maintenance of dialogue, as Osvaldo intervened by acknowledging that arguments based on “authority” are no longer valid in the process of solving the teacher-student contradiction. It is in this sense that Freire (1974) claims that authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it.
CIEJA CAMPO LIMPO

Helping man to help himself

According to Freire (1967), the great danger of assistencialism is the violence of its non-dialogue, which imposes silence and passivity to man and woman, not offering special conditions for the development or opening of their consciousness, which in true democracies must be increasingly critical. Moreover, he adds that without a critical consciousness, woman and man cannot integrate in a society in transition. Thus, he claims that “what really matters is to help the man to help himself - and the people” (Freire 1967:56), placing him in a consciously critical stance in front of his problems. Then, he can become an agent of his own recovery – to recover his own humanity.

As mentioned before, CIEJA Campo Limpo is known by its inclusive practice. The teachers say that they work with those who have been excluded, marginalised. This inclusion seems to be made through a real dialogue, according to the stories shared by students. Following I present excerpts from an interview with an ex-student of CIEJA, who often comes to the school to talk about the Radio Capão, a project created by youth to share the dark and light side of life in the favela:

Harry: I didn’t want to know about anything, I couldn’t get money so I used to steal. Then one day we went to CIEJA. We were having lunch when André [a friend] said that I should study with aunt Eda. She said “you have to study, with the life that you’re having, you should occupy your mind with other things, you can’t stay like this. Come back tomorrow, with your backpack to get your material and you start studying tomorrow.” [Harry] “Tomorrow? Seriously?” I got happy! I didn’t have a school, or anything. So I started studying the next day. I finished one year here, then I left for a trip and after that I had already changed.

Marianne: How have CIEJA contributed to your formation?

Harry: It contributed a lot with conversations. The people are always helping: “stop doing this”, “come always to school everyday.” When it’s time to leave, the teachers say goodbye, good afternoon, good night. [Teachers] “Let’s have lunch?” [Harry] “No, I have to go”, [teachers] “Come to have lunch with us, are you leaving without eating? Come on!” They used to pull us, bring us upstairs, and then we ate, talk to them, look to other matters, not to what I used to see all the time. I used to mess around, only matter of robbery, “let’s rob that place”, I
used to be that way, thinking “let’s go, take some money”. Here is different. [Teachers] “There’s an opportunity of job there, do you want to work?” I used to say “work for what? I can steal anything”. [Now] no, let’s work, see how it is…is better, isn’t it? Then I work, have friends from work, it helps as well. I distracted more, then I completely forgot the other side that existed. Now it’s possible to live happy!

This story brings elements in regard to the relationship between students and teachers within the school. The dialogue between them seems to be directed to helping the student to move on with his life. This attitude goes in line with Freire’s ideas of helping the man to help himself, considering that at the same time that assistencialism sustains the disempowerment of the oppressed, a certain help might be necessary for achieving more equity and justice. This is also a principle of compensatory education (Boyd 1977), which intends to change the unprivileged (limiting) situation in which people find themselves, counterbalancing inequalities and injustices that were built throughout human history. Moreover, the core of the change, hence the core of the humanisation of the oppressed, cannot be other than dialogue itself, which must follow compensatory actions in order to promote true freedom.
THEME 2: PROBLEMATIZATION

Human existence is, because it is done by asking, the root of the transformation of the world. There is a radicalness in existence that is the radicalness of the act of asking.

(Freire, 1985:51)

Problematization relies on asking, and asking is not only an act of knowledge, but an act that fulfils human existence (Streck et al. 2012). Thus, people’s humanisation and hence freedom depend on the development of the ability to ask, question and doubt what they perceive. In regard to this, the world is no longer a static and conditioned reality, but a “problem” to be worked on. Moreover, problematization is a process of learning to think critically, through the movement from naïve to epistemological curiosity (Freire 1996).

Although problematization emerges from dialogue, I chose to discuss these themes separately, in order to focus on the matter of questioning itself. Within this theme, I explore how people in the school have developed a problematizing education. The following situations were selected based on practices of questioning and problem posing.
Learning through questions

Freire (1974) introduces problematizing or problem-posing education as equivalent to liberating education, considering that freedom relies on the development of the ability to question and doubt reality. However, Freire refers to problematization both as a condition for humanisation, and as method of learning. In the following paragraphs, I discuss the practice of individual research in Politeia in relation to problematization as a method of learning through questioning. The conception of learning developed in the school is expressed through this statement from an educator:

Yvan: We start from the idea that the school is not a transmitter of information. Instead, here the students can follow their own way, make their journey, searching, through curiosities and doubts, for what interests them to understand the world.

Within the individual research practice, problem-posing education starts with each student choosing a theme to investigate, according to her/his curiosities and interests. For example, in the first semester of 2015, some research themes were: “sharks”, “circus”, “food”, “animal rights”, “samurais”, “horror movies”, “Pokémon” and “Minecraft”. The students begin their research by creating a list of questions they want to answer. For example, Max, a seven-year-old student, developed his research about sharks through the following questions: “how did sharks appear?”, “which are the pre-historical sharks?”, “is there a fresh water shark?” and “what is the difference between a shark, an eel and a ray?” During an interview, Max explained his research with enthusiasm and confidence, sharing his discoveries and hypothesis:

I discovered that sharks existed even before the dinosaurs! I also found a hypothesis, but I think it’s nearly impossible... they are one of the oldest animals that still exist today. [...] I thought about something that might be true, what happened to sharks might have happened to rays. [...] because I already touched a ray, and from what I know, it’s similar to the shark’s.

It is clear how the student’s curiosity, expressed through questions, drove his learning process about the specific object of knowledge. This process is characteristic of problematization as a method of learning, which requires an
ever-present curiosity, inquiry and interaction with the world (Freire 1974). However, Freire (1996) distinguishes naïve curiosity from epistemological curiosity, arguing that while the former is characteristic of common sense, the latter is characteristic of research, in the sense of development of methodical rigorousness and critical thinking. Based on Max’s interview, it is possible to notice both a naïve and an epistemological curiosity. The abilities to doubt an existing idea and his own thought, to make comparisons and to elaborate hypothesis based on his experience and observation are all indications of a research process driven by epistemological curiosity.

Moreover, the ability to look curiously and questioningly at the world is what makes people capable of acting on reality to transform it, and, likewise, what makes people capable of transforming the quality of curiosity itself – from naïve to epistemological. On the other hand, naivety is not overcome automatically, thus, the educator’s role is both to encourage the critical ability of the student and to respect the common sense in the process of its (necessary) overcoming. Therefore, the practice of research in Politeia is a potential basis for the transformation of a naïve curiosity into an epistemological curiosity, through a problematization process. The gradual development of epistemological curiosity is illustrated by the story of an ex-student, which is presented within the theme Autonomy.

Figure 8. Student preparing the presentation of her research.
Facing the dominant culture

In this extract I discuss Problematization as an attitude inherent in the conscious being. In this sense, those who problematize take an active position toward the world (Streck et al. 2012). Problematization, in this sense, means to perceive reality as a “problem” and hence, act to “solve” it. In this passage, I explore how the educators of Politeia have problematized certain themes that emerged from students’ proposals that were in contradiction with the educators’ ideology of education and society. In regard to this matter, an educator made the following statement during an interview:

Marianne: In regard to a democratic practice, do you think the student’s proposals can be in conflict with the school’s ideology and values?

Yvan: I think yes. Because from the moment that we [educators] decide to be democratic with children and young people, sometimes we ended up in contradiction, considering our ideology or idea of education, society, human being. But we allow this to happen in order to create a pedagogical act, from which we can extract knowledge.

The student’s request to earn money in the school to buy an iPhone is a clear example of these emergent contradictions, as presented earlier within the theme Dialogue. In this case, the creation of a commission to discuss and elaborate a rule is an interesting outcome that demonstrates the teacher’s attempt to develop this issue further.

Marianne: What do you think about the students selling things within the school?

Yvan: The matter of money, the merchandise, is not usually treated in schools. Here, it becomes a theme, which we think is extremely important and pedagogic. To sell things might create a differentiation within the school: who doesn’t play with money can’t buy, who does, can. So what does it mean? What does it mean to buy, within the school space? Why to buy and why to sell? Why do you want to accumulate money within the school? It’s about bringing these issues. If this theme appeared, there’s a reason, and we can use it as a learning experience, not only in the sense of mathematics – the [use] of money, to count, to sum, see the percentage, currency etc – but also to problematize it in our society. In our capitalistic society, what does it mean to have money, to not have money, to buy, to sell etc? For us this is fuel.
In this passage, the educator expresses a critical view of the issue, problematizing the matter of earning money in the school. In this circumstance, he recognises that the student’s request, as a reflection of our society’s structure, could be problematized not through its rejection, but through the creation of pedagogical experiences:

A time ago, some girls were interested in making a fashion show. They called male students and teachers to be the judges, so there was also the idea of making a contest. We [educators] were in between: “forbid it, boycott and say that this can’t happen because we don’t agree”, or “participate in order to bring these issues”. And we participated. We talked to some girls throughout the week, until they made the contest to be, no longer, a contest. The fashion show wouldn’t have a winner or a stereotype of beauty to present, so some girls paraded wearing costumes. The idea was to be fun, playful, rather than reinforce a stereotype within the school, extremely sexist. When we deny, or forbid, it appears in other ways, which are worse. It appears hidden, or without a reflection. In this case I was a judge, so I couldn’t give a score to anyone. I said what I thought about the style of each of them, I appreciated particular things. And at the end I promoted a discussion about why our show was very cool, differently from all the others that I’ve seen, which are competitive, extremely sexist and with a pattern of beauty that is extremely artificial. How each of the girls caught the discussion? I don’t know, but a seed was sown. Maybe later she will see something, listen from her mum, watch on the TV…and keep creating a critical sense.

The students’ proposals of earning money and making a fashion show within the school are expressions of a dominant culture based on profit, consumerism, competition and defined stereotypes of beauty and success. A liberating education requires the problematization of this culture and its values, along with the development of a counter-culture, in order to move towards a less oppressive society. Therefore, recognising that the school could either reproduce or challenge the dominant ideology of our society, Politeia chooses to promote a liberating action and reflection, through a problematizing practice.
CIEJA CAMPO LIMPO

Working on problem-situations

One of the specific objectives listed in the section “Teaching and Learning” in CIEJA’s Project (2008:22) is to work with “active methods of learning”, such as problem-situations. The pedagogical work based on problem-situations is one of the core phases of Freire’s (1967) programme of adult literacy, as a way to problematize real situations lived by the students alongside with learning to name the world. It is important to highlight that Freire does not speak on problem-situations as they are commonly understood within banking education, such as in Mathematics. These are “existential situations” (Freire 1967) which are represented in “codifications” (written text) using “generative words” that were selected from the student’s (spoken) vocabulary. This process consists in the third phase of the adult literacy programme, in which these representations function as challenges (problem-situations) containing elements (words) to be decoded by the groups with the help of the teacher.

Moreover, “the discussion of these codifications should lead the groups toward a more critical consciousness, at the same time that they begin to read and write” (Freire 1967:113). This way, the codifications represent familiar local situations, which, on the other hand, open perspectives for the analysis of regional and national problems (ibid). As mentioned in Section 1 of the Analysis, CIEJA’s pedagogical proposal is inspired by Freire’s work on adult literacy, and this relationship is evident in the problem-situations elaborated by the teachers and used as a basis for learning in Modules I and II. The following problem-situation was given to Module II students, who were learning to read and write:

Francisco was born and raised in the municipality of Cabrobró, located in the Brazilian state of Pernambuco. At 24 years old, he was single, worked in the fields and could not read and write, so he decided to “try life” in São Paulo to get a better job. He packed his bags, took the little money he had, made contact with an acquaintance in São Paulo who rented cheap rooms, and left. To reach São Paulo, using buses as transportation, Francisco went to the city of Petrolina and took a direct bus to Tietê Coach Station.
This situation corresponds to the reality of many Brazilians and CIEJA’ students. In Brazil there is a large movement of people from the North to the South of the country - especially to São Paulo – in attempt to find “better” conditions of life. In CIEJA, the teachers constantly dialogue with the students in order to get to know their stories and motivations to be back to school. Moreover, every year the school conduct a research in order to collect more information about the students. From a set of information, the teachers are able to identify common threads and elaborate problem-situations as the one presented above.

From these situations, the teachers elaborate diverse activities. Some questions regarding this problem-situation were:

A recently constructed building has 56 apartments. Only 35 of them were sold. How many apartments still need to be sold?

Write your version about the continuation of the life of Francisco. What did he do after landing in Capão Redondo station?

Thus, the problem-situation serves as a base both to learn specific contents within Mathematics and other areas and to dialogue, wonder and re-construct the given reality. However, in this research it was not possible to analyse whether the group discussions moved from a naïve to a critical consciousness about the facts. In order to analyse this movement it would be fundamental to notice whether the students, while apprehending a phenomenon or problem, also apprehended its causal links (Freire 1967). Therefore, “the more accurately men grasp true causality, the more critical their understanding of reality will be” (Freire 1967:112). This means to raise questions in order to explore the deep causes and conditions that led Francisco to move seeking for better life. Moreover, what is a better life? And why do some people have a “better” life while others do not? In this sense, the focus of working on problem-situations should be to identify causalities, looking for the roots of the matter (Fielding and Moss 2011). This deepening is, hence, characteristic of moving from a naïve to a critical curiosity and understanding of reality.
THEME 3: AUTONOMY

Nobody is first autonomous and then decides. Autonomy is build in the experience of several, countless decisions that are made.

(Freire, 1996:120)

Autonomy is the experience of freedom in itself, build historically on the decisions that people make throughout their existence (Streck et al. 2012). In this regard, autonomy is a maturity of being oneself, a process of becoming (Freire 1996). However, the egocentric component of an individual should be encompassed in a wider communitarian subjectivity, which means that to be autonomous is to be, at the same time, interdependent in a larger community (Morin 1999). Therefore, in a liberating education, the development of autonomy must be combined with building a democratic society that respects and dignifies all people (Streck et al. 2012).

Within this theme, I present and explore statements and stories regarding the development of student’s autonomy through their experiences within the schools. With this intent, I select cases that express the individual’s power to make decisions and its implications in a collective context.
Making decisions with responsibility

As discussed previously, in Politeia both students and educators participate in the decision-making process to run the school. According to an educator, the decisions are made within two spheres: coexistence and knowledge. While the former consist in the social relations between people, the latter is referred to the content of the curriculum. The educator explained that, basically, the “democratic management of coexistence” is made through the meetings, commissions and forums, while the “democratic management of knowledge” is done through the study groups, individual research and ateliers.

A democratic management means the empowerment of children, which is recognised by Freire (1996) as a large step toward an education for freedom. In this sense, children become free not only to express opinions, interests and needs but also to make decisions in regard to the school organization. Below, I present an excerpt of an interview with a student, in order to draw elements about the development of autonomy and the meaning of democracy for her.

Luisa: When I came to Politeia I just wanted to do homework. I used to ask Aline [an educator] “please give me something to do”. Because I was used to the traditional, from the school I came from. […] She gave it to me, but said “Look Luisa, we are not a traditional school, with test, homework etc, we’re a democratic school” and explained a bit. Before that I had no idea what “democratic” was.

Marianne: And today what to you understand as “democratic”?

Luisa: I understand that it’s something that it’s not only the teacher who decides. It’s not the head-teacher, the teacher and the cleaner who will decide the rules. It’s the children and teachers together.

Marianne: Why is important to decide rules?

Luisa: Because otherwise the school would be a mess! For example, today I dropped a watermelon. What if I hadn’t cleaned it? If there wasn’t a rule “who makes a mess, cleans up”? This rule exists! So I followed the rule.

Marianne: Who created this rule?

Luisa: The people in the meeting.

Marianne: It’s a shame that there were only a few people in the meeting today then, as it is important to decide these things.
Luisa: Yes, but for example, if I leave the next meeting and [they] create or change a rule, I couldn’t “say anything”. For example, if they create a rule “can’t walk barefoot”. I’m one of the people who walk barefoot. Then I won’t be able to, because I didn’t go to the meeting and people voted for the rule. When I arrived here in Politeia, I used to wear only shoes, no barefoot, and now… [she points to her barefoot]

Marianne: If you don’t go to the meeting you can’t say anything about it?
Luisa: I can! I just need to go to the board and write “rule about barefoot”. I can write there to say what is bothering me.

Later on when I asked her what she would think if the meetings were compulsory, she said: “I think it would be a bit boring, because nothing, almost, here at school is compulsory”. Therefore, although she acknowledged the importance of the meetings and rules, she also appreciated the freedom to choose not joining in, or participating in the meetings. However, the non-participation of the students in some activities appeared to be a challenge faced by the school community, as expressed by an educator during the discussion about earning money within the school:

I keep thinking whether this freedom for organising events in the school is valid in the sense that it only applies when it is for “me”. What is the aim for us being in the school? When we say “it’s time for the study group” you [particular student] say “no, the study group is boring”. Is there Politeia? To sell things without participating in the study groups? You [students] just want to bring proposals without taking responsibility for running the school as a whole, see the [low] number of children participating in the meeting.

The events proposed by the students take place during the laboratories, which are referred to as “free time” by the students – even though they have the freedom to decide what to learn and to withdraw from any activity. Moreover, in an interview, an educator reflected on the themes brought by the students to the meetings and concluded that they usually aim to make the school more fun. Although the educator believes that this is important for “making the school also a place of children and for children”, he recognizes that this is only the “beginning of their participation”, in the sense that it is necessary to develop responsibility alongside autonomy, in order to coexist in a single community.
Developing criticality

In continuity to the passage on “Learning through questions” within the theme *Problematisation*, here I present the story of an ex-student who demonstrated an increased critical sense throughout her research. As discussed earlier, the process of research based on problematization is done through continuous inquiry about the world (Freire 1974). Moreover, it involves more than the learning of content, but also the learning of abilities to investigate, read, make relations and think critically.

According to the educators, the themes studied by the students tend to become more complex throughout time. It was the case of Joyce, an ex-student who did her first research on “cute animals”, simply presenting a series of pictures of them. In the next semester, however, “she aggregated a certain criticism to her work, looking for what we call ‘good treatments’ or ‘bad treatments’ [of animals]”, said an educator. She researched the legislation in regard to animals’ rights, looking for the causes for banning animals in the circus across the country. In addition, she interviewed people from a Pet Shop near the school, also developing a methodology of research based on data collection. The educator interpreted that the student moved from a “less-critical state” to a “reflexive state”, from which she was able to notice an injustice in the way that humans treat animals. Moreover, she also realised that, while some animals
were abandoned, others received exaggerated care from their owners, who spent high amounts of money with their pets.

While she was doing her second research, she was participating in a study group about “Conflicts in the 20th Century”. During a lesson about Space Race, what caught her attention was the fact that the first being sent to the orbit of the Earth was a dog, which died after the mission. This episode was contextualised in the period of Cold War, which led Joyce to question the direction of humanity, and to focus her third research on Capitalism and Socialism. Later on, for her last research she decided to study about an anarchist group called “Black Blocks”, which was involved in a series of protests in São Paulo, in 2013. The educators of Politeia were going to these protests, which increased her interest to join in. As a result, she went to protests followed by her mum and, not only interviewed people from different parties, but was also injured by shrapnel from a tear gas pump, which left a scar in her legs. Her story was told by a teacher, along with the student, who was visiting the school after leaving her classes in the new school. She added that she continues going to the protests that are happening in the city.

Joyce’s story illustrates a gradual transition from naïve to epistemological curiosity, the latter being a requirement for the problematization of the world, which, in its turn, lead to an engagement with reality. In relation to her development, the educator opened a reflection:

What if in the first moment, when she chose a theme, we [educators] did not believe that she’d follow a good path? Maybe we would censor some path that was already in her mind, in her way. What if the adults do not make too much judgment on top of this? So from their interests, we need to believe that they will develop a way.

His line meets Freire’s (1996) ideas that autonomy is characterized by the trust that a person has in their own particular history, and it is built from the development of freedom, both individually and collectively.
CIJECA CAMPO LIMPO

Realising dreams

When Freire (1974) speaks on “subject” [sujeito] as people, he refers to those who are engaged in their process of humanisation. He claims that every educative practice demands the existence of subjects, who both learn and teach each other through praxis. Moreover, every teaching-learning in education as practice of freedom implies dreaming (Freire 1974). The dream, thus, is expression of the wish and potential to be more and it is important to nourish hope of a more humanised individual and society. Hope, however, is not a passive state of waiting (1967), but a thread for praxis and engagement. Furthermore, those who dream must become the subjects of their own dream.

In CIEJA, the students are invited to share their dream when they register in the school. The idea, according to the head-teacher, is to help them to remember what they wish for their lives. It is also a way to keep them motivated to continue their studies. The teachers have access to the student's dreams in order to dialogue about them with the student, though the importance given to them varies according to the teacher’s approach. In one classroom of Module II, for example, there is a paper tree on the wall, in which the students posted their dreams – in the shape of a leaf. Some examples of dreams follow below:

Figure 10. Tree of dreams.
• Get rich. Buy a house
• To become a lawyer, take a driving license, buy my house, buy my car, have my own company.
• To read and write.
• Finish my studies, make a course of mechanic engineering, have my own house and build my own company.
• Get a driving license, move out from my neighbourhood.
• Be an auxiliary or nursing.
• Have a motorcycle XT660 and a house.
• Build my house on the beach.
• Read and write to not feel embarrassment.
• Have more option in the market of São Paulo.

Among all the statements on the tree, I intended to show a diversified sample. The majority of them was related to read and write and/or get a property – a house or a car. While learning to read and write is considered by Freire (1974) an important process for humanisation and freedom (along with the development of criticality), the desire for material goods is a sign of the desire of the oppressed to join the dominant (and oppressor) culture, from which they have been excluded. The students of CIEJA not only live in the margins of the city, they are marginalized in a society that is sustained by money and where success is measured by purchasing power. Thus, the desire to participate in the system is a result of their marginalization.

This data expresses one of the major challenges for a liberating education pointed out by Freire (1974). Although the dominant culture set people into limit-situations indeed, people tend to conform to the conditions that are given to them, as argued by Fromm (1956). Therefore, a liberating education requires - from the teachers and students - problematization of the dominant system, in order to develop a critical (not naïve) consciousness about the world and the oppressive conditions in which they find themselves. Only then, moved by consciousness and an active position with the world, the individuals can affirm their positive freedom, and be driven by their own being - not by the dominant/external ideas.
On the other hand, a blind student who learned to read and write Braille at CIEJA and continues visiting the school after graduating, had a different dream:

Ronildo: My dream? *It was to learn how to be a completely independent person.* And learn the news, the things that are appearing.

Marianne: And what is independence for you?

Ronildo: *Independence is to not depend on everyone. Of course you always need someone, regardless of being disabled or not.* But the maximum you can do yourself, be independent, is better. When I started to be independent from people I started to achieve many things. Before, people had to have good will to bring me to the places, if they haven’t, I couldn’t go. […] I didn’t used to go out, I was completely dependent. And because of this dependence I lost a lot of opportunities in life. Then I decided to go to the world…

![Figure 11. Blind student who lost his sight due to police brutality opening the gates of the school.](image)
THEME 4: ENGAGEMENT

Radicalization involves increased commitment to the position one has chosen, and thus ever greater engagement in the effort to transform concrete, objective reality.

(Freire 1974:37)

Engagement with reality is developed along with conscientização, as an action-reflection (praxis). Moreover, commitment with people’s humanization and acts towards freedom can only exist in engagement with reality. In analogy, committed men and women are those who get “soaking wet” from the “water of reality” (Freire, 1997:9). However, true commitment cannot be reduced to gestures of fake generosity, neither to unilateral acts. Instead, commitment is a dynamic encounter between humans in solidarity, through a single and mutual gesture of love (Freire 1997). Moreover, to commit and intervene in reality is a courageous and conscious act, which does not take place from a neutral position, but in defence of humanisation in itself.

Within this theme, I explore actions that took place outside the school environment, which I consider to be expressions of engagement with reality. Here, I do not cover individuals’ stories, but actions of intervention that were taken by the schools as a whole, as a re-affirmation that school is not merely a reflection of society, but also society is a reflection of school.
POLITEIA

Going beyond the school gates

As part of the meeting agenda, the educators brought a theme to discuss with the students: a protest against a proposed law: 'PL 4330,' which would allow the outsourcing of workers for any activity in private and public companies. This law would estimate the contracting of outsourced employees both in “middle-activities” (necessary services that are not the main activity of the company) and “end-activities” (main activities of the company). Currently, the outsourcing is allowed only for “middle-activities”, although these definitions are still not clearly defined. During the meeting, the educators explained briefly the idea of outsourcing and the proposed law, however, the students seemed disinterested, and some even left the meeting. Despite this, the educators made their position saying that this was a very important cause for them, and that they wanted to participate in the protest, which would happen on a normal school day. They wished everyone would go, including the parents, however nobody was obliged. The group voted for the protest to be the only activity in the school that day, so the students who would not join in were to stay at home.

On the same day, the tutors talked about the protest with the students during a tutorial. An extract of a dialogue with children from six to eight follows below:

Carol (educator): On Wednesday we’re going out with the whole school. There will be a protest, who has been to a protest with their parents?
Irene (student): I have! But after the first time, I’ve never been to another one. My parents didn’t want any more, because you know… the police is throwing bombs in every protest.
Carol: And what is a protest?
Max (student): Protest is a big bunch, billions of people, protesting to improve something in the city.
Carol: Yes! In this case, people are protesting against the outsourcing of the work. For example, Politeia hires Edu to work here. Then, instead of Politeia hiring a teacher, Politeia will hire a company that will hire the teachers for Politeia.
Julio: Very strange.
Carol: And what happens with the worker? He has many rights, one of them is the 13th salary. If we outsource all the work, we take the risk of losing all these rights that the workers have won through many previous protests.
Irene: But this is unfair!
Carol: There are people that think this is better, and there are people that think this is unfair. Politeia is going there to protest against the outsourcing of the work, because we think this is unfair. It will bring a lot of injustice to the workers.

Despite these explanations, the educators noticed that many students did not understand what outsourcing was, so before going to the protest, the educators led a role-play, in which the students took part. The story was narrated by an educator, while the students played the roles of a owner in a toy factory, a worker in the factory, a owner of an outsourcing company and a worker hired by the outsourcing company. A student said in an interview that she had only understood the problem after this activity.

Educators, students and a few parents left the school and went to the protest by bus. On arrival at the protest site, at a central square, the educators and students were doing some activities, creating scenes to compare a company that outsources work with a company that does not. Politeia's community painted posters saying “Politeia Democratic School against the outsourcing” and “against the PL 4330,” and attached them between a few polls on the sidewalk.

Figure 12. Politeia in the protest.

In the next week, during a School Council meeting with parents and educators, some parents expressed their concern towards bringing the children to the protest, especially to write posters with a fixed opinion in the name of the
school. In their opinion, the children were “lifting a flag” that was not theirs, but the educators’, without understanding and being conscious of what and why they were protesting. However, some parents had a divergent opinion, saying that even not understanding well what was happening, the children learned from that experience, and it is important for them to get involved in social mobilizations. Both opinions were listened to and reflected on by the educators, who proposed to look for different ways to participate in protests.

**Clarifying political position**

In regard to the previous episode, Freire (1974) would say that education is never neutral or nondirective. He defends education as a “form of intervention in the world”, which is made not only pedagogically, but also ethically. However, before any intervention, an educator must have political clarity (Freire 1974). The educators from Politeia proved to be in constant praxis, expressing their political view, through their pedagogical practices, dialogue with students and announcements on the school website, such as the following:

**POLITEIA’s participation in the National Shutdown Day (29/05)**

Last Friday the school did not open its doors. Supported by family members present in School Board and students, this was the way that educators found to participate actively in the National Shutdown Day of various categories of workers and, more specifically, the teachers’ struggles across several states.

In our view, school education is also political. We do not want Politeia to be a bubble, like other schools, with one reality inside the school and another outside it, since the school is part of society.

Here in São Paulo, the state teachers are starring in the biggest strike in its history (83 days today). Besides the lousy wage of 12 reais per hour/class [GBP 2.50], they live poor working conditions, in a school that is still a promise of social mobility for the 90% of Brazilians who study there, mostly poor children of the working class.

We left the routine and protected space of the school and entered the public social space, because we believe that such experiences are part of the school formation.

In the face of the global crisis we face, the working class will suffer many attacks; see the budget cuts, devaluation and general negligence by governments etc. We need to be aware of it all and position ourselves in this
situation. For this reason, Politeia participated in the act against the PL4330, and closed last Friday.

From this announcement, it is clear the educators’ position in relation to the struggles of the working class. Although Politeia is a private school, it expressed solidarity (Freire 1994) for those struggling and contributed to the humanization of those in the school, who might then continue engaging in liberating actions. With this in mind and heart, to further engage in liberating actions, we must always choose solidarity over alienation.

Figure 13. Poster in front of the school supporting the teacher’s strike.
CIEJA CAMPO LIMPO

Intervening in reality

CIEJA is commonly known by its *popular education* and active engagement with the local community. According to Freire (1996), *popular education* designates education *with* people, with the oppressed, with the popular (working) classes; which is gnosiological (concerned with the philosophy of knowledge), political, ethical and *esthetic* - mutually aesthetic and ethics. A popular education as practice of freedom is oriented to the transformation of society, starting from the context of concrete experience and reaching the theoretical context through epistemological curiosity, problematization, creativity, dialogue, *praxis* and protagonism of the subjects (Streck et al. 2012).

In 2006, the new government at that time announced the intention to close all the CIEJAs in the city. Aware of this, the school community planned a form of protest to get the attention of the media and the government. Coincidentally, the secretary of education of the time was about to visit a municipal school in the same region in that month, and his visit would be televised live in an open national channel. CIEJA community, knowing about this event, made posters and elected representatives of students and staff to go to the neighbour school during the broadcast in order to talk to the secretary and get attention for their cause to keep the school open. The secretary could not ignore the crowd that formed behind him during the broadcast. He listened to people’s request and arranged a visit to CIEJA in the next days.

According to Eda and some students that were present on the day of the secretary’s visit, the school was completely occupied by people from the community, who followed the secretary around the school spaces sharing their stories. Ronildo, the blind student mentioned within the theme *Autonomy*, shared his struggle to go to school and asked for a school bus to transport the students with special needs. A few weeks later, four buses were provided, which remain until today. Since then, the school gained visibility and started to receive more support from the government. However, the CIEJAs are only running due to Eda’s agreement and commitment to write a general project for all the thirteen centres in the city (CIEJA 2008), which was later presented by the secretary to the Chamber of deputies.
Moreover, CIEJA’s community already developed several interventions within the school area, as listed in the book by Coletivo Educ-Ação (2013):

- Campaign against smoking: students went to the streets with a four-meter cigarette with a message against smoking.
- Use of leftovers from the local fair: the school kitchen served soups to the community accompanied with lectures on nutrition.
- Installation of communitarian bins over a stream where people throw garbage.
- Planting trees along an avenue close to the school.
- Redemption of own cultural roots with the knowledge of the history of Capão Redondo, through the production of texts.

All these actions were discussed and decided according to the community’s needs. Currently, the school community is engaged in building a garden in the shape of a smiley face (voted by the students) on the roundabout in front of the school, using re-utilized tires. These are examples of intervention in reality, which emerge from the engagement with transformation. This, in its turn, is the result of critical awareness of real problems that affect the community, creative power, and love for people. Furthermore, it is through this process of engagement and intervention that women and men re-invent themselves and become subjects of their own humanisation.

Figure 14. Community garden in construction.
REFLECTIONS

A case study approach gave me support to collect data through direct experience with the schools, which was fundamental for integrating with people and their context. I consider that a study which intends to discuss and encourage humanisation must be developed through dialogue, always from a position to learn from people and their experiences.

An important consideration is that having extensive data also requires extensive time to review the recordings, transcript them and identify key elements that contribute with a more integrated understanding of the complex dynamics and relations that compose each school. Therefore, although this study aimed to investigate the school as deep as possible, the short amount of time spent with each school and the restriction of material analysed are certainly limitations of this research. However, providing a whole picture or understanding of a dynamic and complex system would not be possible, especially from an external perspective. Overall, I believe that this study presented rich elements of school practices, which fluently dialogue with the theory of liberating education.

The question whether education as practice of freedom can be developed within schools leads us to the question whether positive freedom can be developed within limiting situations. I suggest that the latter question is a reformulation of the former, based on roots of the matter. Thus, a positive answer for one requires a positive answer for the other. This means that education as practice of freedom can be developed regardless of the challenging and oppressive conditions that people find themselves. Moreover, these challenges and limitations are source for problematization, and must be questioned not only from a critical mind, but also from a loving heart.

Essentially, we can only humanise ourselves once we become conscious of ourselves. Furthermore, we can only change the world once we change ourselves. Humanisation and freedom, hence, could not start in a place other than the being itself. Therefore, a positive freedom should gradually move towards new ways of being with the world and with people, which is a process of deschooling in itself. This freedom is then developed mutually inside and outside each of us, through an ever-present dialogue nourished by love and hope.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Appendix A: Transcript of school meeting (Politeia)

[In regard to the previous occurrences of students selling things in the school]
Carol (educator): ‘Do you remember what we discussed in the day when we found out that this was happening? We did not know that this was happening. The sale was happening without going through the school meeting, so it could not happen. The other selling that we had was in a specific event, when we had a tent and the bracelets were sold there; this went through the meeting beforehand. This that you want to do, you could do in a website, you could take pictures of your things with a text, and what you could do inside here is to share the website with people here to see if they have interest.’
Luisa (student): “I think that, if it is allow to sale, Aliya can bring something and say ‘today I brought this’, so she has to communicate at least in the opening circle or in the meeting.”
Aliya (student that made the proposal): “I could also give part [of the money] to the school, because I’m selling here. Or I can send an email to the school and say that ‘these’ days I will bring some things to sell.”
Yvan (educator): “In regard to this specific matter of selling. If I bring something to sell with the assumption that some children have money, and others do not – because some are older, receive allowance from the parents, take buses; therefore, handle money in their daily life, while others don’t – so I create a differentiation within the collective: children that can buy and children that cannot buy. I think this is very bad. Then I remembered when the school promoted the ‘swap fair’… that it is already a reflection about how we can swap thing without money as intermediate. I think that if we really want to sell and buy, maybe we could organize a day for this.”
“But I will be very direct to you [Aliya]. I keep thinking whether this freedom for organising events in the school is valid in the sense that ‘it only applies when it is for ‘me’. And what do ‘I’ do with this freedom if later when we go to the tutorials or study groups ‘I’ do not participate? What is the focus for us being in the school? There’s a specific question in relation to your participation in the pedagogical part of the school. You already brought the proposal of ‘the friend
day’, ‘Easter chocolate’, ‘The rap’. ‘Let’s make a day rap?’ ‘Yes, as long as we discuss the lyrics and meaning of it’, then you dropped out. When we say ‘it’s time for the study group’ you say ‘no, the study group is boring’. Is there Politeia? To sell things without participating in the study groups? Can I chose just the laboratory part, and no the study groups? I think not. You are bringing very interesting proposals, but they don’t become viable simply because you [all] just want to bring proposals without taking responsibility for running the school as a whole; look the [low] number of children participating in the meeting.’

Aliya (student that made the proposal): “What if we make a week for testing? I send email to the parents today and say the days that I will sell the things. There are things that were used, and things that were not used. Then the parents give money to the children. Just for them to be aware. Then we make for one week, I would bring a toy on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday to be sold. Tomorrow I was thinking to bring one already.

Osvaldo (educator and mediator): ‘Ok, this is your proposal. But Yvan said something to you, and to all – to you because you made the proposal – but you didn’t answer. What do think about this? Can we make many proposals - that can be cool – but in other moments, in other activities, do not take responsibility or participate?’

Aliya (student): ‘ But do I need to answer?’

Osvaldo (educator): ‘I think so. I would like an answer to decide my vote. If you don’t want to, you don’t have to.

Aliya (student): ‘But I do not know what to answer.’

Osvaldo (educator): ‘Did you understand the problem?’

Aliya: ‘No’

Osvaldo: ‘The problem is: you and many people cease to participate in several things in the school; on the other hand make several proposals of what matters to you. [For example] the chocolate day was your proposal, but you didn’t come.’

Osvaldo: “Let’s move forward. The theme is ‘earning money in the school’, the question is ‘can we sell things in the school?’ There were already cases of things being sold here. I think the idea here is to take a rule, I do not know if should be a general rule or if we going to decide case by case. Are we going to create a rule that goes for all, or we going to decide case by case?”
Osvaldo: ‘Ok, so now we are going to create a general rule here.

Carol (educator): I have a ‘forwarding proposal’: to create a commission to think about what would be these general rules, and then bring them to the next meeting to see if the meeting approves it. Because I think we will enter in many details difficult to continue now. I offer myself to sit with those interested and think about these general rules.’

Osvaldo: ‘Is someone against this idea of Carol?’
Aliya: ‘Why Carol didn’t think about this idea before, the other times? I don’t think we should do that because we are many weeks late [in the meeting agenda].’

Osvaldo: ‘You should consider that this topic was not resolved, but it was discussed. In the previous weeks, it was not discussed – because we had a lot of things to discuss. Today it was discussed, but it is a complex subject, so it will last more than one meeting. But this does not mean that we are not going to resolve it.’

Carol: ‘There are four minutes to finish the meeting. I think it is difficult to think in a rule in this time, that is why I suggested a commission so in the next meeting we come with the rules already thought.’

Aliya: ‘But in the next one?! For the next one there will be one week. Why did you not give this suggestion before?’

Carol: ‘Because I waited to listen the people. I could bring a rule out of the blue, but we did not gathered to discuss this before. The interested people could also articulate to bring rule.’

Aliya: “I have a proposal for the rule.”

Osvaldo: ‘So first let’s decide if we going to create the commission or decide he rule now. Carol gave a proposal – you are against it - so we have to decide. If we decide to do it now we going to have to extent the meeting’

Carol: ‘But nothing hinders us to gather ideas now, for example’

Aliya: “My rule would be: to send an email one day before bringing the thing to sell and then, during a laboratory, to separate a bit [of the money] to the school, because you are selling in the school”.

Osvaldo: “Can it be anything?”

Aliya: “Yes.”
Osvaldo: "So the rule would be: can sell anything, as long as you send an email one day before and give a percentage to the school."

Osvaldo: ‘Carol’s proposal was before, to create a commission – to think about this - or not. Let’s vote, should we create a commission to discuss this subject for next week, or not, to discuss it now – and extend the meeting a bit.

Carol: ‘But is there a way to decide now? I think the meeting finish 2:30. When we do no manage to discuss everything, we continue in the next one.’

Osvaldo: “If the meeting decides to finish the subject, it can be as well.”

Yvan (educator): “I think that Aliya made a cool proposal, but given the number of people that stayed [in the meeting] and because it is a single proposal; I think that if we continue to discuss this, her proposal will be misinterpreted and will not be approved. So Aliya, I think you can participate in this commission, gather ideas – good as yours - with other people. Otherwise it is going to be ‘yes’ or ‘no’, and I think that with an organized commission we can get an intermediate proposal. If we decide now will be ‘yes’ or ‘no’ and I think because of the tiredness the ‘no’ will win, and it will look as a prohibition. I think it is possible to gather, talk and build it together.”

[Osvaldo talk to Yvan]

Yvan: “But I am trying to talk directly to Aliya, for her to withdraw her proposal, not because it will not be accepted, but for her to create an interesting proposal with the commission.”

Aliya: ‘But it would take until next week’

Yvan: ‘Let it be. There are things take might take the entire life to know.’

Aliya: ‘Like what?’

Yvan: ‘Like how it is to die. We need patience.’

Osvaldo: “But wait, she is against it, we need to give a forwarding. We can’t keep trying to convince her.”

Carol: ‘But she being against it, does not mean that the meeting has to keep discussing the subject. This is the question.’

Osvaldo: “But we need to decide the forwarding proposal. Otherwise we are being authoritarian.”

Aline (educator): “She can be against creating a commission.”

Yvan: “But the meeting will decide for creating a commission or not”

Osvaldo: “Yes, let’s vote now. Create or not a commission?’

[VOTING: The majority of the group voted for creating a commission]
Osvaldo: ‘Who wants to participate in the commission?

[Four students raised the hand and registered]

Aliya: ‘We are also participating in another commission, ‘the friend day’.’

Luisa (student): “I didn’t participate in the ‘friend day’ because Iara (the educator) did not call us.”

Osvaldo: “But you also need to chase after, it is not only the educator.”

Aliya: “But is was her [Iara] that gave the idea.”

Yvan: ‘No, it was you [Aliya] that gave the idea of the ‘friend day’.

Aliya: ‘Yes, but she gave the idea of the commission.’

Carol: “But you [students] can gather without the educator as well.”

Luisa: ‘Ah, so we decide things without the educators?’

Carol: “No, you bring to the meeting.”

Osvaldo: “The commission does not decide things, it organizes to bring to the meeting.”

[Osvaldo asked if someone else would like to participate in the commission and then finishes the meeting]
Appendix B: Transcript of discussion in class  
(CIEJA: Module I)

During a class in Module I (Literacy), the students were doing an exercise for writing the spelling of given numbers. The teacher had put a few numbers on the board and the students were writing the spelling in their notebook. The students were in groups and the teacher was moving through the classroom to give them assistance. Suddenly two boys of eighteen-years-old entered the room asking permission to the teacher to give a message about a petition. Theses boys created the project TV Doc Capão – an open channel for sharing ‘the good’ side of the region - and are engaged in social causes within the area of Capão Redondo. They brought a petition for supporting a project of law that ends with the use of the term ‘acts of resistance’, used by the military police.  

[The boys give one pamphlet to each person in the class, which has information about the theme and a space for signing]  

André: ‘Acts of resistance’ is a term used by the police every time it kills a person, especially in the periphery. [The police] says that the person reacted to the arrest, to the authority, and it ends there. This law [in the petition] is for the end of this term used by the military police, because there is a big problem: sometimes the people that are killed using this term are not related to the process [of crime], and never had a criminal record. They are workers that many time were in the front of the house was murdered by the police, who said he reacted to the arrest.  

André: ‘If you want to contribute with us, with the process for this law, behind the pamphlet there is a space for signature. We are collecting signatures because in July I will spend three days in Brasilia to present this law to the Chamber of deputies’.  

André: ‘Because it is a process that continues and continues and we see that who is murdered under this term are always the same people: live in the periphery, is youth between fourteen and twenty-nine years old and is black. Thus, we are the target of this process.’  

Maria (student): ‘But what about the bandits that also kill the policemen? The bandits kill the police too. It is wrong. I do not agree that the bandits kill the police.’  

Katia (teacher): But what about the many innocents that the police kills?
Joana (student): ‘And there is also the corrupt policeman’
Rebeca (student): Ô! It is full of them!
Bianca (student): I know a lot of them! Where I live…’
Amanda (student): ‘What these youths are saying is important. Why? Because today who is dying more are innocent people. Look, they are man that goes out at night, [the police] thinks they are ‘marginal’, it kills them then throw [the body] in places to find it two, three days later. Youth that were going to work, they [the police] catch teenagers and hit on them when they are not doing anything. Boys in the school, [the police] hide drugs in their bag to say that the boy is a drug dealer…There is all of that! This boys are right to make a debate like this.
Katia (teacher): ‘Another things, if we look the amount of ‘blitz’ (police car that stops people) that are here just because the youth are poor and live in the periphery.. this does not mean that they are bandits.’
Amanda (student): ‘Just because the boy is wearing a branded shoe, [the police] think he is a ‘marginal’. All of this have to be discussed. Is the ‘marginal’ right? Of course not, I would never say ‘this he can [do], but what these boys here are discussing is good to see if [the police] stop killing so many people. There are many innocent people dying, and the bandits are still there… this is what is bad, isn’t it?’
André: ‘We believe that none death can justifies another death. But this law consist in what? In ending with an excuse that they [the police] use to kill people from the periphery. Every time that the police uses this term, the civil police and the community has to investigate. Then, it will be two sides of the coin, for us to know who was the person that was killed. Does he/she used to work? Had criminal background? And then we believe that we will reduce the number of this violence. Last year, only in São Paulo, 1100 people died [under this term]. This is more than in a war, in Iraq for example. So we are making this invitation to you join in this process.. because in Brazil we only start questioning when happens to our family, with our children, when it happens to us.’
Reduction of the penal age

“Proposed Amendment to the Constitution (PAC 171/1993) within the National Congress which calls for lowering the legal age of majority from 18 years of age to 16” (UNODC – United Nations on Drugs and Crime)
The following discussion is a continuation of the previous discussion about the ‘acts of resistance’. The two boys left the classroom saying that they would
come back later to collect the signatures, as the student needed time and assistance from the teacher to sign it. While they were signing the petition, the teacher introduced another polemic theme for discussion: the reduction of the ‘penal age’ (age of criminal responsibility). This is a current issue in Brazil, as the national government is proposing to reduce the penal age from eighteen to sixteen years old. Moreover, this proposal created unrest and led to a sequence of protest by those who are against it.

Katia (teacher): ‘There are moments that, if they do not exist, the situation of the periphery and of those less privileged would be much worse. A discussion that is... I don’t know if you’re following it… it’s the reduction of the penal age. Does anybody heard of this debate?

[Some students reply in sotto voice: ‘I heard’ or ‘No’]

Teacher: ‘Is is to reduce the age of the youth who is catch ‘in delicto’… so, from eighteen to sixteen years old.

Student (Claudia) that is signing the petition asks: ‘What is this here, teacher? What is this number?’

Teacher: ‘This is the number of the law’

Claudia (student): ‘To call?’

Teacher: ‘No, no… every law has a number. This is the PL4471, the proposal of law. It’s not a law yet. As André said, for you to create a law… Who creates [the laws]?

Maria (student): ‘The workers, aren’t they?’

Teacher: ‘[No], there are, in municipal level, the alderman; in the state level the state representative; and national, the federal representative. Then, because of this, when we’re going to vote it is very important for us to know in who we’re voting. Because there are these people who make the law for us to comply. So, a law plan, if it’s federal, you need to go to Brasilia and bring [it] to the federal representative for him to present it to the plenary. So, every law… every federal and state representative or alderman are the ones who propose the laws so they can be approved. Then it’s important for us to get involved in the debate, because as Maria said, we never think about things until they happen with someone from our family, someone next to us.’

Iracema (student): ‘They put a law to reduce the legal age and put another law, the ‘spanking law’ [lei da palmada], that the parents cannot hit the child? How does it work? It’s complicated. I think that there’s no need for this ‘spanking law’
because if the parents ‘educated’ their children, we wouldn’t need this other law [legal age]. They kind of fall into ‘contradiction’ [she says ‘contradiction’ making a gesture of quotation marks with the hands].

Teacher: ‘But this ‘spanking law’ is not like that. It’s against battering the child. So it’s a matter of abuse, of violence against the child. There’re parents who say ‘so I can’t even correct my child?!’ Of course you can. None judge will condemn a father, a mother if she didn’t beat the child. However, if you beat [the child], it’s another issue…’

Iracema: ‘But nowadays is like that... I already saw this, like in a bank agency. The people stare. That child with tantrum, if the mother gets a sandal to hit [him/her], people think she’s already aggressing. They look like ‘this woman can’t do this’. They think you can’t hit [the child] at all, correct them in any way.’

Teacher’s sister (visitor): ‘It’s because… look the name [of the law], ‘spanking law’.

Teacher: ‘But there’s many interpretations. I think that education… for example, the education of my child... If I don’t educate [him] right, I’m charged for that, ‘abandonment of unable [person]’. There’s a law for this as well. So the laws you interpret in many ways… and the lawyers know that, use that a lot and interpret in the convenient way.’

Jessica (intern): ‘My teacher, she’s taking a master, she said that this law of ‘sixteen years old’ is very bad explained. Why? Because it [education] starts from the base. There’re parents that don’t stay at home, there’re mothers that are a father and a mother. So, how can she give a specialized education for her child, if she need to brings what he eats, clothes, shoes, give [him] better conditions of life... this is, many times, what is ‘to give education’. Why? Because education doesn’t start with seven, eight years old...no, it has to start from the base. And many times the mother leaves [home] in the morning, leave the child in the nursery and that institution is advocated to educate that child. School is [meant] to teach, not for educate! Sometimes we say ‘school is for educating’, no, it is for teaching. So, she [her teacher] was saying that this law of sixteen years contradicts many laws.’

Teacher: ‘It contradicts even the ‘child and adolescent statute’. This debate is polemic, but it’s very necessary. Why? Because we ended up ‘outsourcing’ the education of our children.’
Manuela (youth student): ‘And the person cannot hit their children with a belt and these things. Educate is also... I see many parents talking [to the child], giving penalties, saying ‘you won’t watch TV’. Because if you hit, the child will be revolted with you when she grows up. When she grows up she will say to you ‘remember when you did that to me?’ That's what I do with my mum, because I’m a teenage and my mum used to beat me a lot.’

Teacher: ‘Are you revolted with your mum?’

[Everyone laughs]

Manuela: ‘No... my mum used to beat me a lot, but not my brother.

José (student): ‘You have to cut what [the child] likes.’

Teacher: ‘There are other ways to educate, that’s what she [Manuela] is saying.’

Manuela: ‘Yes, give a penalty: ‘you won’t go out, you won’t use your phone, won’t use the computer, won’t watch TV, play videogame. It’s not hitting!’

Teacher: ‘Even because hitting will not work.’

Joaquim (student): ‘There is son who hits the mother as well. [He] can’t do that.’

Manuela: ‘Because the mother hits him a lot.’

Teacher: ‘Maybe there was the contrary there? Because the child was beaten a lot and then... People, it’s not that simple, it’s not a recipe. I was beaten a lot as well, but I fooled around a lot. My dad used to say ‘you’re not going’, and I [said] ‘I will’... Then I got home and ‘pow!’

Manuela: ‘My mum used to put me on my knees, on the beans, and whipped me on the middle of my knees. In that time of the horse whip.’

Teacher: ‘But I’m not revolted with my mum, neither with my dad.’

Manuela: ‘Me neither, I understand my mum as well... I fooled around, I understand my mum.’

Teacher: ‘Then when you have a child, in my case... I say ‘Ai, I will have to learn many things.’

Manuela: ‘Yeh! Everything we mess around when we are young... when our children are young, they will do the same with us. My mum used to say this to me.’

Teacher: ‘I hope not!’

Teacher: ‘People, let’s just finish the discussion. This discussion about the ‘penal age’ it’s something that affects us all, who are mothers, who have families, siblings. Then it doesn’t help to reduce [the penal age], because what
leads the youth to the ‘crime world’ are many [reasons]. So the discussion of many movements is ‘let’s talk about the cause, and not the effect when it’s already spread’. So it doesn’t help to reduce the age if you don’t go to the base, if you don’t improve the education, if you don’t improve the social conditions. Then it stops being an excuse ‘because he is poor he is a bandit’. We know it’s not like that. I grew up in a ‘favela’, also did my brothers, and not because of that we’re bandits. How many of us have family that lives in a ‘favela’, or lived in one… this is not a condition.’

Manuela: ‘It depends, there’s mum that...’

Teacher: ‘But it’s not the social condition that defines if the guy will be a bandit or not. There are many other issues involved, familiar structure. There are many things, many factors. So we cannot believe that one law will resolve the problems. Reduce the penal age will not.

Manuela: ‘Let’s stop talking too much and let’s do the lesson, because soon... look the time!’

Teacher: ‘But this discussion is also part of the learning.’

Manuela: ‘Yes, it’s also good to talk, because we say what we... of something that we didn’t know. We express ourselves a bit.’

Teacher: ‘There’s a space for you to express yourself. Maybe in other places you don’t [have]. But let’s come back... What were the numbers that I dictated?’

Students: ‘One, ten...’