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## AFFILIATION IN THE SIXTH YEAR OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE STUDENTS

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### Abstract

The transition from elementary school to junior high is a process that requires special attention, since, in Brazil, the dropout and failure rates are higher in the first year than others in junior high. To research this phenomenon, we adapted the concept of affiliation, proposed by Coulon (2008) to investigate students in the transition to postsecondary education. In this paper we discuss and reflect upon the use of affiliation to investigate the transition to 6th grade. We utilized various approaches to collect data from regular students, during the second semester in 2019, and data analyses were based on content analysis. Affiliation is not enough to analyze the ethnomethods created by the students, but we complemented it with a new category that deals with relationships to have a wide perspective of the transition.

PRIMARY EDUCATION • AFFILIATION • REPETITION • DROPOUT

## AFILIAÇÃO NO SEXTO ANO DO ENSINO FUNDAMENTAL SOB O OLHAR DOS ALUNOS

### Resumo

A transição para o sexto ano da educação básica é um processo que merece atenção, visto que o ano tem apresentado taxas de reprovação e abandono superiores àquelas encontradas nos demais anos finais, no Brasil. Neste texto, apresentamos a adaptação do conceito de afiliação, proposto por Coulon (2008) para a transição do ensino médio para o superior, e discutimos e refletimos sobre o uso do conceito para o sexto ano, a partir de um diagnóstico em uma escola pública de grande porte. Foram abordados os alunos de turmas regulares no 2º semestre de 2019 e analisou-se o conteúdo dos dados coletados. A afiliação é insuficiente para a análise de etnométodos criados pelos estudantes, mas é possível, ao complementá-la com uma dimensão relacional, ter uma visão abrangente da transição.

ENSINO FUNDAMENTAL • AFILIAÇÃO • REPROVAÇÃO • ABANDONO ESCOLAR

## AFFILIACIÓN EN EL SEXTO AÑO DE EDUCACIÓN BÁSICA DESDE LA PERSPECTIVA DEL ESTUDIANTE

### Resumen

La transición del quinto al sexto año en educación básica es un proceso que merece atención, ya que el sexto año en Brasil ha mostrado tasas de fracaso/deserción más altas que las encontradas en los otros años finales. En este texto, presentamos la adaptación del concepto de afiliación, propuesto por Coulon (2008) para la transición de la escuela secundaria a la educación superior y discutimos y reflexionamos sobre su uso para el sexto año, basado en un diagnóstico en una escuela pública. Se adoptaron varios enfoques para obtener los datos y se realizó un análisis de contenido de los datos recopilados. La afiliación, en la forma concebida, es insuficiente para el análisis de los etnométodos creados por los estudiantes, pero es posible, al complementarla con una dimensión relacional, tener una visión de la transición.

ENSEÑANZA PRIMARIA • AFILIACIÓN • REPETICIÓN • ABANDONO DE ESTUDIOS

## AFFILIATION À LA SIXIÈME ANNÉE DE L'ÉDUCATION PRIMAIRE DE VUE PAR DES ÉLÈVES

### Résumé

La transition de la 5ème à la 6ème de l'école brésilienne merite l'attention des gestionnaires, car la 6ème année présente des taux d'échec/d'abandon plus élevés que ceux des autres années terminales au Brésil. Cet article presente une adaptation du concept d'affiliation proposé par Coulon (2008) pour la transition du lycée vers l'enseignement supérieur. Il discute les avantages de l'utilisation du concept ancré sur un diagnostic réalisé dans un établissement scolaire public où des élèves ont été interrogés en 2019. L'analyse indique que l'affiliation, telle que l'auteur, a conçu est insuffisante pour comprendre les ethnométhodes utilisées par les jeunes. Cependant il es possible avec le complement d'une dimension relationnelle de réussir une approche plus large de la transition.

ENSEIGNEMENT PRIMAIRE • AFFILIATION • RÉPÉTITION • ABANDON D'ÉTUDES

**I**N THIS PAPER, WE DISCUSS THE CONCEPT OF AFFILIATION ADAPTED TO THE STUDIES ABOUT the transition from the fifth grade of elementary school to the sixth grade of middle school. The concept of affiliation was proposed by French sociologist Alain Coulon in order to investigate the passage from high school to higher education. To demonstrate it, we present a multidisciplinary diagnosis performed with sixth graders in a large public school.

The expansion of elementary and middle school in Brazil is a relatively recent phenomenon. Just in the 1990's the country reached fill rates higher than 90% for students between 7 and 14 years old in its schools. In 2020, they were almost 100%<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, there are obstacles that defy managers and teachers concerning the democratization of education, high retention rates and high dropout rates.

The sixth grade is a known bottleneck in the sequence of middle school. The retention rates in sixth grade in Brazil in 2018 were high (11.7%, according to data from INEP), although the dropout rates were 2.5%. In relation to the public system, the rates increased to 13.2% and 3.0% in the same year, respectively, which it is not a surprise. There are several reasons that cause shock<sup>2</sup> in the students when they migrate to a grade in which there are no more "tias" (a word used by children to call their teachers in Brazil and that means "aunts"), there are many teachers who do not even know the names of their students, there are older boys who can be threatening, etc. This happens in a much higher degree if there is a change of school. Many times, a change of school also means changing from rural areas to urban areas, which brings more challenges.

Another fact is the (lack of) preparation of schools for transition. In many cases, schools are not prepared to recognize institutionally their students' particularities due to many reasons and they do not prepare themselves in order to make the change between grades and between schools occur organically. In these cases, in the transition from fifth grade to sixth grade, the students themselves need to build a competence that allows them to adapt themselves to this new formal learning space, with its explicit and implicit rules, both academically and institutionally.

It is important to consider both educational transition, from elementary school to middle school, and the transition from childhood to adolescence, potentially sparked by puberty, which, in terms of age groups, begins around 8-9 years old for girls and 9-10 years old for boys, approximate ages that can vary according to nutritional, social and cultural issues. The adolescence is not a natural process that will be lived equally by all youngsters. According to Le Breton (2011), culture is a condition for its existence, being the adolescence the product of a society of individuals, in which the collective rituals of transition do not exist anymore.

Furthermore, the social inequalities contribute to the production of diverse adolescences. Thus, as Guareschi (2012) says, it is necessary to break essentialized ideas of adolescence. With this in mind and observing the youngsters with whom we worked in the research, we consider it valid to think the educational transition articulated to the entrance in adolescence, experienced in rather diverse conditions and subjective temporalities. The subjects, whose affiliation process we discuss in this article, assured themselves as adolescents in our meetings, which is certainly an effect of subjectification, as says Guareschi (2012) relied on Foucault, since they think about themselves from sociocultural references to

- 1 99.3% is the net rate for elementary school and middle school in 2017, according to data from IBGE/PNAD, in the age group between 6 and 14 years old (Todos pela Educação, 2019).
- 2 See the works of Paula et al. (2018), Davis et al. (2013), Pereira and Silveira (2017), and Silva and Wolf (2015) for a discussion about issues that characterize what we called "shock".

which they belong. We became interested, from another angle, by the fact that we need to be aware to how they subjective this experience referred to as adolescence while they live the educational transition.

We can add structural and functional factors, not only in educational systems, but also in schools to this panorama, such as: lack of specific policies for middle school (Davis et al., 2013), lack of articulation policies between school grades, aggravated by the occasional absence of pedagogical coordination (Leite, 1993), lack of teachers, teachers who take over school subjects for which they are not prepared and insufficient school infrastructure. Although they are not the focus of this work, such questions also hamper the transition from fifth grade to sixth grade in the elementary school and middle school.

In spite of not working specifically with the referred educational transition, sociologist Alain Coulon presents instigating thoughts about the passage from the high school to higher education. The author proposes that the entrant, searching a new status, learns the craft of university student. Coulon (2008) says that, in the passage to higher education, the high school student needs to develop other cultural schemes in order to become member of a new culture that is “more complex, more sophisticated and so much more difficult to decode”. Referring to the acquisition of this new status, the sociologist called it affiliation, categorizing it as institutional affiliation and intellectual affiliation. The academic questions are related to the contents and to how to do / think which is adopted in higher education. The institutional affiliation involves learning the places and the institutional rules, such as enrollment, attendance, etc. As to affiliation, Coulon proposes stages strangeness, learning and affiliation itself. The student who becomes affiliated, that is, becomes a member, stays in higher education. There is effort in this process, which does not happen spontaneously and it can be facilitated or hampered, depending on the institutional processes.

In order to investigate the process of transition from fifth grade to sixth grade in Brazil’s public schools, we proposed an adaptation of the concept of affiliation. Thus, affiliation would be the acquisition of the status of student who belongs to middle school. By proposing the adaptation of the concept, we intend to know: what provokes strangeness in the student? How does his / her affiliation happen?

By investigating the transition from fifth grade to sixth grade, we intend to think about the use of the concept of affiliation. Were its “institutional” and “intellectual” dimensions insufficient? Would the stages “strangeness, learning and affiliation” allow the analysis of the transition when the subject observed is an adolescent and not a youngster or a young adult? Is it possible to adopt a proposal that was created to think the transition from high school to higher education and use it for the passage from elementary school to middle school?

We applied the adapted concept of affiliation in the perspective of a diagnostic research performed in a public school that is part of municipal school system of a city located in the metropolitan region of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. In this work, we briefly present the research and some of its results to illustrate the use of the concept in the passage from elementary school to middle school.

The referred diagnostic research was the initial phase of an intervention research which goal is to investigate the transition from fifth grade to sixth grade, aiming to develop a support technology for this transition, considering the municipal school system, the school management and the classroom. The intervention research is linked to the investment proposal of Fundação Carlos Chagas and Fundação Itaú Social in the search for the quality education in middle school.

For the data collection in this initial phase, we performed a drawing activity involving all the sixth graders (280) from the school unit, in which we seek to evaluate their feelings related to school. Thereafter, we made three conversation circles (Sampaio et al., 2014; Henares de Melo & Cruz, 2014) totaling 38 students in an age group between 11 and 14 years old, most of whom were girls. To conclude this diagnostic phase, we conducted four photography and drawing workshops that

involved 45 students, some of whom had participated in the conversation circles. These meetings were photographed, recorded and later transcribed. About the transcriptions, in this diagnostic phase, we made a content analysis, proposing categories after the first readings of the material.

The school in which the research was developed is the largest school of the municipal system, with nearly 1.600 enrollments in 2019 (year of the data collecting), which contemplates middle school, offering places for regular teaching, “Juvenile Time” and second formative period for “Youth and Adult Education”. It works in three shifts: morning shift, afternoon shift and evening shift. It receives students from 9 to 17 years old in the morning shift (regular teaching and “Juvenile Time”), students from 15 to 60 years old in the evening shift, with classes of “Juvenile Time” and “Youth and Adult Education”. In the school, the staff comprises 46 permanent teachers and 28 teachers with limited-period labor contract with the Secretary of Education, with a faculty formation indicator of 61.6%.

Still about the school in which the research was developed, it is important to point out that the school concentrated 80% of enrollments in middle school in the city where the data were collected, which implied that students from the most diverse regions and from different schools (including the ones from rural areas) began to meet in a larger and more diverse space than their previous schools. Students’ and school’s identities are kept confidential. Thus, we use “School” to designate the institution in which the research was developed and the letters AL (from the Portuguese “Alunos” which means students) to indicate the students’ speech.

In this paper, we present the concept of affiliation, adapting its use for middle school. Afterwards, we systematized some of the results produced from the adapted use of the concept in the study about the transition to sixth grade of the students from the school mentioned above. We give emphasis on the strangeness and learning stages. In final considerations, we made an analysis about the adapted concept of the affiliation in elementary school and middle school.

### **Dialoguing with Coulon: from the craft of the university student to the craft of the middle school student**

In the scenario of democratization of higher education in France and considering the studies about success in higher education, Alain Coulon published, in 1995, the first edition of the book *Le metier d’étudiant: l’entrée dans la vie universitaire*. In 2005, in the second edition of the book, the author argued that the democratization of teaching had not been followed by the democratization of the access to knowledge and he defended the goal of favoring the “intellectual learning of the students” as well as the “entrance in the student’s craft”.

Ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 2007; Coulon, 1993a, 1995b, 1995c; Santos, 2007) understands the individuals as authors who live and modify the reality around them through their daily interactions and their context. Thus, the interpretations made by the actors about the social facts and the descriptions of the environment in which they act are privileged, instead of seeking explanation for their behaviors. However, by adopting a micro-social approach of the phenomena, ethnomethodology does not untie them from their bigger contexts, understanding that the problem studied is a complex phenomenon in which there are a great number of habitually situated parameters in the macro level (Coulon, 1995).

Equally, ethnomethodology takes position against Durkheim’s comprehension that proposes that the objective reality of social facts is the basis of sociology. Thus, ethnomethodology is inscribed in the propositions of daily life sociology.

Criticizing Durkheim, Coulon (1995, pp. 25-26) writes: “the ethnomethodological approach considers the facts as “practical realizations” and not as “things”. Ethnomethodology is interested primarily by “the social instance making itself” and not by the “socially consolidated”. When he tries

to avoid misunderstandings in relation to ethnomethodology, Santos (2007) says that there is no doubt about the goal of Garfinkel's research, which describes the manners through which the individuals build and understand their lives, their methods of daily life realization. It is the comprehension of society constituting itself.

Coulon (1995a, 1995b, 1995c) still establishes the importance of ethnomethodology for the education as this approach allows us to apprehend phenomena, which escape from classical approaches; the fact of dealing with learning question and rules internalization by the social subjects increases the chance of bringing promising analyses to the educational field. It is possible to include, as topics that would benefit from ethnomethodological treatment, the school failure and/or school exclusion once they occur in the daily school life, more precisely in the interaction network between students and teachers. Similarly, the topic of the transition between fifth grades and sixth grades can be benefited and, here, we present the adaptation of Coulon's proposal.

In 2008, Sampaio and Santos translated *Le métier d'étudiant: l'entrée dans la vie universitaire* into the Portuguese Language, adopting it in the studies about student life, focusing initially on Federal University of Bahia. From then on, the concept of affiliation came to be used in several studies, always focusing on the higher education students, for example, the investigations made by the authors of this article. Would it be also possible to approach the question of the transition, investigating how the student who passes from fifth grade to sixth grade – also in the transition for the adolescence – learns this new *métier*?

Coulon defends that the “academic success depends mostly on the capacity of students' active insertion in their new environment”; that the failure and the abandonment are related to the non-mastering of “intellectual requirements, methods of exposure to knowledge and the students' *habitus* (Coulon, 2008, p. 32). That is, success and failure are linked to becoming or not member of that new place/group/time, learning new rules, mastering the tools.

Considering that this process also occurs in the transition between elementary school to middle school it is important to ask: Which ethnomethods did these sixth graders adopt to insert themselves in a new school, a new grade, with new teachers? Which ethnomethods are being valid for the permanence in school? Which routines are easily absorbed and which ones are more challenging? By ethnomethods we mean “practices employed in the common sense and the meanings that the individuals attribute to their actions, whether they are trivial or scholar? (Sposito et al., 2017, p. 1256).

For the anthropologist Van Gennep<sup>3</sup> (2011 apud Sampaio & Santos, 2015, p. 206), the passage encompasses the ritualistic transitions in which an individual changes his/her status inside the group, suggesting a process in three consecutive phases: separation, transition and incorporation. Coulon (2008) describes the transition in stages: strangeness, learning and affiliation itself. “Thus, far from constituting itself as a natural, evident or spontaneous fact, the status of student requires effort, resembling to the learning of a new craft and, to some extent, to a sophisticated game amidst rules and knowledge which are characteristics of the university life (Sampaio & Santos, 2015, p. 206). Besides, we have to consider the significant difference between the transitions that are experienced in-group and operated through collective rituals and the work of affiliation in the context of a society of individuals that falls upon the student who, as mentioned, will not necessarily count on institutional devices that facilitate his/her transition.

When we adapt the concept of affiliation to analyze the transition between fifth grade and sixth grade, the role of school management and public school system in this process is evident, since a fifth grader or a sixth grader has smaller repertoire and autonomy than the student between high

3 Van Gennep, A (2011). *Rituais de passagem*. Vozes.

school and higher education. Therefore, the student deserves that the institution offers conditions for the new craft to be learned without much suffering.

Which parallels do we establish between the transition from high school – higher education and between elementary school to middle school? The following table presents a summary of Coulon's arguments in the construction of the concept of affiliation and our arguments in the concept adaptation for the transition from elementary school to middle school.

**TABLE 1**  
**ASPECTS OF COULON'S CONCEPT OF AFFILIATION, TO BE USED IN THE TRANSITION FROM THE FIFTH GRADE TO SIXTH GRADE**

Dimension	Coulon's argument	Our argument
Key Year	The first year in the higher education is the one in which the student must learn his/her craft or he/she ends up failing (catastrophic year)	The sixth grade in middle school is the grade with the highest rate of retention. It is when the student receives more autonomy and he/she is no longer so much tutored.
Autonomy acquisition	Coulon refers to the change of the place of knowledge, the opposition to the parents' speech using new speeches constructed among peers.	With the changes of adolescence and of teaching institution, it is about the autonomy acquisition through the expansion of their social network and of the first movements of separation from parental references. The relationship among the peers and the appropriation of the new reality with multiple school subjects and teachers can facilitate the autonomy acquisition or not.
Simultaneous disruptions that occur in the life and in the school	Passage to the higher education followed by changes in the conditions for existence, affective life (leaving the bosom of the family) and pedagogical disruption (change in their relationship with teachers) – "Anonymity Time"	Passage to middle school marked by the beginning of the adolescence, body changes, first sexual experiences, questions about gender identity and sexual orientation, change in the place occupied by the family as a central reference, exploration of new territories in his/her city, contact with multiteaching models, less familiar relationship with teachers.
Institutional responsibility with the success of the student	Adoption or lack of institutional devices affect the development of the student's affiliation.	Here, our argument is equal to Coulon's, without the necessity of adaptation. Isolated actions by teachers, for example, are not enough in the process of affiliation. We need to think about institutional devices in the analysis of the processes of affiliation and permanence.
Changes in the relation with time	There are changes in the university's requirements (larger and looser) for the student, which implies the necessity of reorganization of time and pace of work.	There are changes in the number of school subjects, different classes each day, which implies reorganization of study time and life time. It is important to point out the "social networks" as an important element in the resizing of the relation with time and space.
Changes in the relation with the space	To the author, the students claim that the space of a university is larger than that of a school, which makes them get lost initially and makes it necessary to learn to move.	The change from a small school to a larger one in the passage from elementary school to middle school may bring the challenge of identifying classrooms, canteen, common areas, and bathrooms, among others. What's more, the way they appropriate these spaces, for example, canteen, represent the power relations among students.
Changes in the relation with the knowledge	Larger knowledge breadth, more necessity of summarizing and relating to the future professional activity.	The organization of middle school is closer to the high school than elementary school; passage from a concrete thought to a formal logical reasoning.
Changes in the relation with the rules	The student needs to master the complex system of institutional and non-institutional rules, seeking the "game meaning" to manage to do his/her affiliation.	Similarly, the sixth grader needs to learn the explicit new rules and those ones that derive from the informal culture in middle school, concerning to the school routine and space appropriation. On the other hand, there is a great demand on the part of teaching staff for family's participation in the school, which, mostly, does not happen.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

When Coulon comments about the French system, he says that the processes of affiliation in the high school go unnoticed, because that country has institutional devices – such as orientation, class council, among others – “that makes them believe that they deserve to be in that place”, but these processes flourish strongly in the university entrance, when students find themselves “experiencing a lot of anxiety” (Coulon, 2008, p. 36). In our contacts with the sixth graders, fear and anxiety were present, especially in the first months of transition. Our hypothesis, when we adapt the concept of affiliation to use with these students, is that it is also possible to observe the three stages (strangeness, learning and affiliation) in the passage to middle school.

### **“When I first came to school, I already had my heart in my hands”: news about strangeness**

We asked sixth graders what they felt in their first day of school. Several students answered our question using the words “fear”, “anxiety” and the expression “butterflies in the stomach”. In some cases, these sensations originated from the opinion of parents and even teachers who described a more violent and gloomy scenario for the sixth grade in a school that is larger than that one from which they came. During the data collection activities, we identified other elements that provoked strangeness.

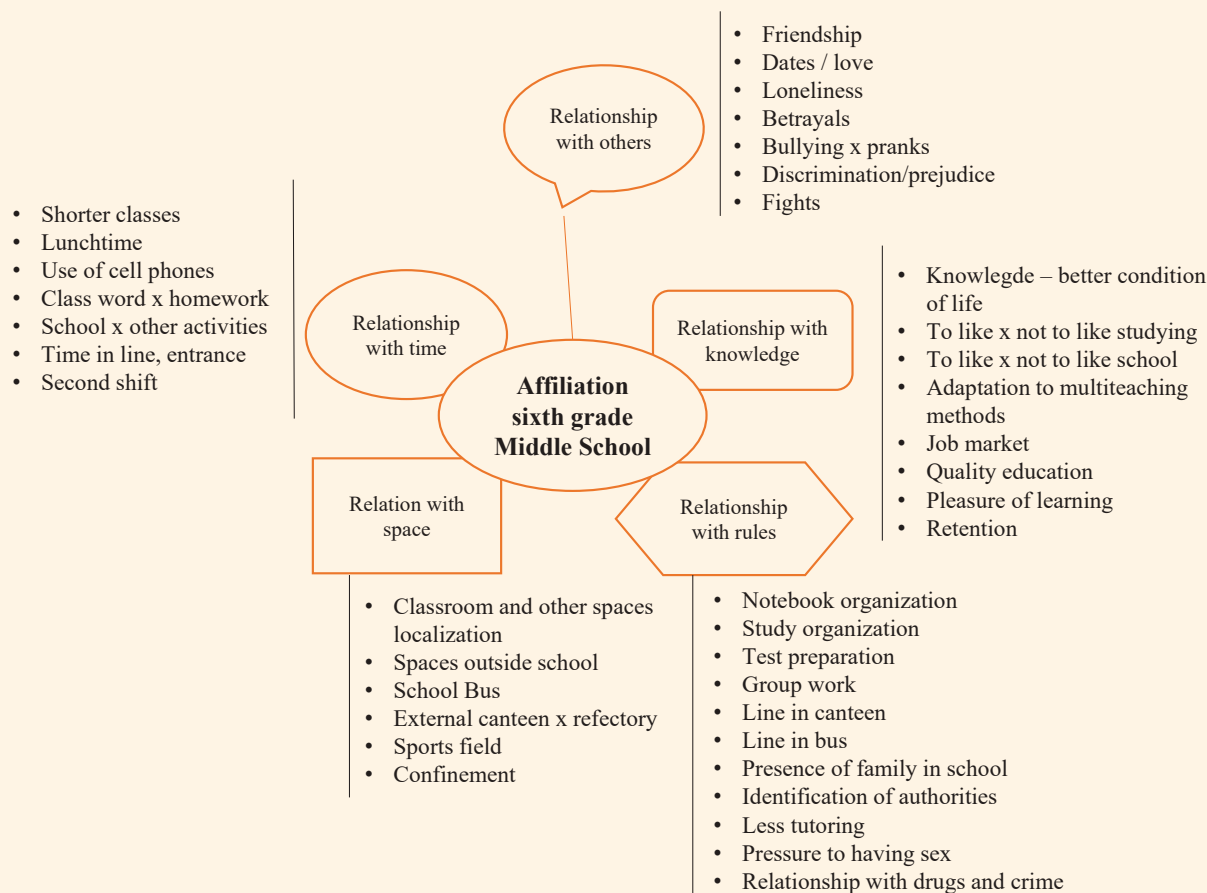
The categories proposed by Coulon (2008) were not enough to explain the elements that were more mentioned in our data collection: those directed to the relation with the others were much more evoked than those ones related to time, space and even rules, although they were also present. Such difference may be partly understood by the importance of the changes lived in the adolescence, especially in relation to body image and alterity (Alberti, 2010). The deconstruction of the child body provoked by the puberty may launch the subject in a double movement: grief and reconstruction of their corporal image. The search for a style, through which he/she can mark the presence in the social field, is part of the reconstruction of this image. During the reconfiguration of himself/herself, there is a great sensitivity to the other person’s view. For this reason, bullying feeds situations of psychological suffering.

About the relation with alterity, the conflicts with the parents appeared as a question for some, mainly for those who went out for squares, parties and began to date. Some teachers and coordinators were viewed as reference people, besides music idols. In relation to intersubjective dimension, the experience of perceiving himself/herself as an adolescent, among those youngsters with whom we talked, is permeated by concerns related to diverse forms of violence inside and outside the school. The questions, which refer to the territories of origin and to the conflicts that migrate from the territories to the school, deserve attention. The coexistence with violence caused by the drug trafficking and the daily scenes of rights violation are elements which make a difference in the processes of subjectification linked to adolescence.

The summary of the panorama of the strangeness is presented in the Picture 1 and already includes the “relation with the others” dimension. In this dimension, the reference to dates and “love” appeared a larger number of times, followed by questions that were related to bullying, “situations” which involves to make the others uncomfortable, fights, discriminations and prejudice, friendship and loneliness (sometimes due to a perception of “betrayal” or “falsehood”).



**PICTURE 1**  
**ELEMENTS THAT PROVOKED STRANGENESS IN THE SIXTH GRADE OF MIDDLE SCHOOL, 2019**



Source: Authors' elaboration.

### Relationship with the others

The sixth grader is entering his or her adolescence as we pointed out before. This aspect is crucial in order to understand the questions that involve the transition from fifth grade to sixth grade and it is reflected by the words of the participants in the workshops and conversation circles. In addition, it is important to notice that the students are curious, but they do not have yet a repertoire that “protects” them from the “threats” that they perceive on others and they possibly adopt a more aggressive response. It is important to remember that in the school in which the research was developed there are not only students from central regions, but also from distant and violent neighborhoods. In this panorama, according to the students, talking or negotiating with that person who bothers them is more difficult than doing a physical intervention, as it can be seen in the following statement.

*There are many jealous people, they cannot bear to see the other person doing something and wants to do too. Let me see, it is not possible to distinguish false friends from the true ones. We get angry, we feel like hitting and killing. (AL48).*

In these processes of transition, therefore, the school must seek strategies of dialogue about the topics: friendship, dates, loneliness, bullying (in many cases viewed as a prank) and even fights. Moreover, the pedagogical processes must observe that, among the students, there is reinforcement of prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes that, without school intervention, may be consolidated. During the data collection, we observe racism, misogyny, fat calling, homophobia and transphobia, besides discriminatory issues linked to religiosity and original neighborhood, especially if located in a rural zone.

*When that girl over there comes, people keep talking – “It seems that she came from Africa”. Oh, My. Just because she is black. (AL 95).*

*He should be ashamed of himself. Man likes woman and woman likes man, isn't it? (AL 102).*

In several occasions, during the interactions with teachers and principals, we observe that they do not have a repertoire to deal with these questions either. For example, a boy that kisses a girl in the back of the classroom or two girls who declare that they are dating are facts that generate apprehension among teachers and, sometimes, imply that the “transgressors” will be sent to coordination. Some “deviant” behaviors that escape from “normal” standard are quickly considered indicators of the necessity of involvement of the students’ safety net, which includes psychologists, doctors and even the police.

Among the boys, there is the fear of being hit and being forced to use drugs or get involved in the drug trafficking; among the girls, there is the fear of being raped or the fear of not making friends. Such fears point to the question of violence as being a central issue to be faced intersectorally.

Closing this dimension and regardless of strangeness, there is the reference to the grief, which was common in the three different conversation circles. In addition to the grief of the body, the grief of the child condition and the grief of the former school, there are still very concrete situations of loss, linked to the violence and the ways to deal with it. The students mentioned losing father, mother, sister and cousins and a student mentioned the death of his grandfather.

*I don't know, when I listen to this song, I feel like crying . . . I remember someone who has already died. (AL12).*

*I had a cousin and he died. He was a ninth grader here. (AL32).*

In several ways, when we worked with the “relationship to others” category, the phenomenon of violence was present. We consider it important to point out that violence, understood as a human act, is different from aggressiveness. Aggressiveness is related to a necessary movement to our physical and psychological survival. It is present, for example, in the movements of separation that the adolescent needs to live in relation to his/her first family references. Violence, in turn, points to an excess in the relation with alterity and involves a non-recognizing movement or, in the most extreme cases, the annihilation of alterity. According to Costa (1986), violence cannot be confused with aggressiveness, it is not instinctive and, therefore, it is not natural. It is always shaped, legitimated and regulated by the society and by the culture.

By understanding, from the psychoanalytic view, that the adolescent is still a subject in constitution and that adolescence involves an arduous psychological work (Lesourd, 2004), the mark left by the daily exposure to several forms of violence in the process of subjectification of adolescents is an important element in the results produced and requires a more detailed attention. Anyhow, we need to stress that the adolescence is lived amidst many challenges, characterized by fear and by the hopelessness feeling, which can be intensified in the absence of the necessary support to work the several transitions involved in this process.

### Relationship with time

In the “Relationship with time” dimension, the first aspect to be considered is that, in sixth grade, the classes are shorter. When two classes of school subjects as Mathematics or Portuguese are consecutive, sometimes, the students feel that they do not have time to copy the classwork, for example. There is strangeness with the number of school subjects, which results in a greater amount of weekly superposed homework, demanding a time organization in order to do not only the homework, but also considering the games in cell phones, soccer and other forms of occupying time in the second shift.

Later in the semester, students that are invited to participate in the school tutoring<sup>4</sup> in the second shift, declare that they do not want to do it, because staying in the school all day eliminates their “playtime”.

In terms of time, however, the greatest number of evocations were related to the time (and rules) in lines: in line for the bus and in line for canteen, in order to lunch. This second strangeness happens to students that reported that they had not eaten lunch for 15 days, because “when their turn came, it was the moment to return to classroom”. This strangeness was also related to the time spent waiting in line for the bus and all the threats that this meant, including the fear of not getting a seat or even missing the bus. The lines, therefore, reveal power games among adolescents, involving the physical dispute over the seat occupied by a youngster, for example, due to his/her involvement with the drug trafficking.

### Relationship with space

The “relationship with space” dimension emerged more intensely in the photography and drawing workshops, besides the drawings of initial activity. The spaces more evoked were the sports field, the canteen and the spaces outside the school area, but inside the school complex (a wooded and large area that includes two more schools). These collective places do not necessarily have the teacher mediation.

There was also reference to the corridors and to the “small corners”, specific benches in which the drug trafficking was mentioned and an external canteen that contributes to the complementation of lunch for some students. Other interaction space is a square next to school, which favor dates and rapidly recognized by its reputation.

*Oh, there is the square where you see...you probably see more someone dating. (AL 07).*

The localization of the classroom is a first-day doubt, not only for the students, but also for the parents that take them to school, but later it is not a problem anymore. There was no reference to the localization of the bathrooms in the students’ speeches and drawings, although they reacted to graffiti and drawing found there. Welcome policies and support to transition encompass a walking in the school, normally led by older students in order to recognize and appropriate the space.

In “Space” dimension, one aspect to be considered was the number of students who associated school to a prison, with bars, high walls – fortresses – observed in the drawings. The sensation of confinement was verbalized more than once in the conversation circles. The school is surrounded by two high walls, there are bars in the entrance and in the wings (the classrooms from a grade are installed in a wing and they are isolated from the other grades). There are people who control the corridors and a door attendant who control the access to school, besides disguised police officers who act as security guards in the external area of the school and in the outskirts. There are bars in some doors, such as in the computer lab and in the library.

Another interesting aspect to be considered in the relationship with space is that it starts in the school bus. This is the first space of school, according to students (and teachers). It should not be a space of strangeness, since the student already used this means of transportation to go to school in elementary school. Welcome policies and support to transition must take into account not only the school as a space that deserves attention, but also the bus.

4 The school which is focus of this study offers both tutorship, a support to students with specific difficulties diagnosed in the classroom with around 8 students, and parallel recovery, which is offered to those who “lost the school unit” after the test results.

## Relationship with knowledge

The “relationship with knowledge” dimension, for the students observed, can be translated into “to like studying x not to like studying” and “to like school x not to like school”, being the latter different from the former. The student commonly says that he/she does not like to study, but likes the school for many reasons, among them, his/her socialization. To like studying (more common in the speeches than “not to like studying”) can be expressed in his/her preference for specific school subjects (such as Physical Education). For the students, the more structured knowledge of middle school must be treated with more circumspection and there is an association between this knowledge and a “better life”, the job market and the profession. There were several evocations about the fear of being entering a school with a teaching quality lower than their school of origin (even without proof and with further changes of positioning, according to reports) and a fear of failing.

In relation to school failure, it is interesting to notice that it is used to mock another student or as a segregator among classrooms, which increases the newcomer’s apprehension.

[About a song with an accelerated rhythm] *Everybody knows it, but learning to read and write to move on to the next grade, nobody knows. Laughs... Am I right, [name of the classmate].* (AL74).

*I have a nephew here who is about to get retired from school due to a lot of school failures.* (AL81).

*In my classroom, everybody repeated the grade.* (AL111).

*Fight! An awful classroom. They wanted to fight me. I was put in a horrible classroom. Fight all the time.* (AL8, about the classroom of students who repeated the grade).

When we think the transition from fifth grade to sixth grade and the affiliation of the students in this new environment, it is fundamental to consider the policies of “grouping”. Although the decision of putting students who are different in terms of maturity in a same classroom may be harmful, it is not adequate to group all the students who repeated a grade and those who repeated many times in a classroom to avoid the students’ stigmatization.

In terms of adaptation to multiteacher models, which is a characteristic of middle school, there was not much strangeness. The plurality of teachers in fourth grades and fifth grades, although in a smaller number, is part of the policy of the municipal school system in which the research was developed. Thus, in the transition, the strangeness declared was greater in the school than in the classroom. That is, the fifth grade (and maybe the fourth grade) must also be involved in students’ preparation for the transition from elementary school to middle school.

The pleasure of learning was manifested in a discussion about BTS and K-pop<sup>5</sup> and the willingness to learn Korean/to know Korea, was mentioned by two students.

(About K-pop) *The rhythm and also the language, because I want to learn Korean.* (AL101).

[name of the classmate] *said that she wants to go to Korea to make a tattoo. She is going to learn to make tattoos.* (AL182).

There is pleasure in learning, not always the contents taught in school. This was also evidenced during the preparation for a thematic exposition in the school: a student who had repeated a grade many times, with very low academic performance, became totally involved with one of the vice-principals to learn to do a wooden panel. Differently from what happened in the classroom, according to the teachers, the student spent a lot of time concentrated and silent, accompanying and eventually testing the new practical contents.

5 K-pop, or Korean Pop, is a Korean musical style that has invaded the Western, conquering, especially, the adolescents. This musical genre exploded with the phenomenon Gangnam Style, by Psy, in 2012. In 2017, BTS drew crowds to their concerts in Brazil.

For Charlot (1996, p. 49), we need to privilege the meaning in the learning processes. It is not about investigating the competencies or cultural capital of a child, but “what is the meaning for the children to go to school and learn things, what mobilizes them in the school field, what incites them to study”. Thus, the relationship of the student with the school happens through the relations that are created with classmates, teachers, managers, coordinators and the school itself. What is the meaning and what is the value that the school and the school contents have for that adolescent? This is what educators and other professionals who aim to the transmission of knowledge must wonder.

### Relationship with rules

The last dimension analyzed here, “relationship with rules”, is important because when we perceive and learn the rules, we are in a frank process of affiliation. These rules are not only explicit rules, but they also – and maybe more essential – are the implicit codes which guide the relationships between students and students, students and teachers, students and authorities and even students and parents when the former are in the school environment.

A code of silence and the self-censorship were present both in the workshops and in the conversation circles and maybe they are one of the most important rules of the context studied. Even with the secrecy assured, some students prevented other students from detailing, for example, aspects of violence in their neighborhoods, codes that they brought from home. Other students avoid mentioning more spicy songs or hip-hop and rap, believing that they could be infringing the rules in the conversation circles. Examples of these implicit rules already acquired are:

*I will not mention names. If I mention names, I die. (AL49).*

*The buses from there are already marked. The three buses from schools are already marked. The police have already stopped them countless times. (AL118).*

*If someone listens to “brega” (corny) songs, you pretend that you do not listen, ok? (AL 180).*

Learning to deal with the diversity of authorities was also mentioned, when they think about crime, violence (non-formal authorities), the Police, the teachers, the coordinators and the school management.

*Police bother us. It's like...when a person is doing something wrong, they order everybody to get out from there. (AL104).*

*We have to think about these people, because there are some policemen who abuse authority. (AL33).*

*I have to push my backpack against my body, because if I leave it in the desk, when I come back, it is not there anymore. (AL21).*

The fear of being induced to consume drugs and, according to girls, the “pressure to have sex” make them learn, but also learn to break the rules. In many cases, there was an expectation about the pressure to use drugs, the pressure to have sex and negative contact with the police, although any concrete event had happened. The rules were being learned from the expectations.

Still in terms of coexistence rules, there were those related to the bus, the canteen and the use of collective space, so that learning them prevented the student from being harmed.

*There are boys from [name of another school] who do not allow nobody go to the back of the bus. Whoever goes there, they order to go back, there are seventh graders who go, and they send them back. (A102).*

In terms of learning, interestingly, the students needed to handle basic rules since the beginning of the school year. For example, to know how to distribute the school subjects throughout the parts of their notebooks (“in the beginning, they mix the school contents, which hampers the posterior

studies a lot”, told us a teacher) or to master the weekly schedule so that they could bring the adequate materials for this or that school subject. In the school, some teachers reserved time of their classes to teach how to use the notebook and present the schedule.

Other group of rules was related to the coexistence with the direction, the coordination and the responsible adults for the students (mainly mothers and grandmothers) when they were present in school. In the next section, two ethnomethods adopted by students in this case are described.

A greater autonomy is given to the sixth grader when compared to the autonomy given in previous school grades. The tutorship is relatively smaller. For example, the teacher, in the sixth grade, seldom have time available to correct the homework of their students individually during the classes. Those students, whose relationship with the knowledge has to do with fulfilling the rules, report that they have learned to do their homework in certain days. Those, however, with a looser relation with the knowledge tend to procrastinate doing their homework, to do them carelessly or simply not to do them, without any social loss, even though they may suffer it in terms of learning and performance.

During the conversation circles, tests and evaluations were little mentioned, with a student associating the test to the possibility of “performing well” in a relation of positive rewards in the execution of the activity.

At last, one aspect that seems to be more troublesome for the students investigated is teamwork. In the workshops and in the classroom, the “groups of friends” are more easily formed than the work groups. During the workshops, it was clear that the rules of working in the group were not mastered: there was difficulty in the division of the tasks and of the material, for example.

In strangeness and learning, the conversation circles were rich so that we could understand the questions of affiliation in the sixth grade. Furthermore, several ethnomethods adopted by these students to affiliate themselves and to stay in the new environment were presented.

### “Fear has gone”: news about learning and affiliation

The sixth grader has not the right to be a dropout. By Brazilian law, the student is obliged to attend the basic school from 4 to 17 years old and it is duty of the family, in a partnership with the schools, to assure that this student attend classes, under penalty of being denounced to the tutelary councils and other relevant institutions.

The student does not choose which school he/she will attend either. In many cases, the enrollment happens on the basis of the localization of school and residence, not being a parental choice. In this research, the School concentrates 80% of the municipal enrollments. Thus, the students, since their first day in school, need to use methods that favor their permanence, in first place and, maybe through this, their learning. An evaded student does not learn. The policies that approach the transition from fifth grade to sixth grade must take this fact into the account.

A common phrase in the development of the conversation circles was, “The fear has gone”. Thus, it was asked what the students had done to adapt themselves to school. In the students’ speech, the most employed ethnomethods in the first days (and months) in the institution were related to the formation of a safety net. To them, the first step is to seek, in the much larger group of the new school, those who came from their schools of origin and identify the “friends”. The second step is to establish friendship with the new classmates. This net becomes protective against the cases – concrete or imaginary – of bullying, discrimination, fights, and dilutes the “fear”. It is also activated in the lunchtime (especially in the lines of canteen), in the relationship with teachers, in the tutorship and in small infringements.

*I asked my mother to bring me because I was afraid. They said that many bad things would happen and then I was scared. But, later I was making friends and today I am not very afraid. (AL12).*

*I was scared, with butterflies in the stomach, fear of being alone in the classroom, without knowing anyone of my past friends. (AL35).*

*I was very anxious to know everybody. I was afraid because I did not find any of my old friends. So, when [the name of a classmate] arrived in the classroom, I got happy because I found two of them to stay with me. (AL43).*

*I like to play with my friends, and I also like to mock the boys and I like to fight with my friends too. (AL75).*

As the school year went by, the student was demanding less that his mother or the responsible adult took him to school. This strategy, for the student, would reduce his fear of the unknown and would protect him. When he made friends, the necessity of his parents in the school reduced a lot.

This aspect points to the need of favoring coexistence spaces on the part of school management, in which those friendships can surpass the walls of the classroom. This will generally contribute to the reduction of the prejudices about other classrooms and the diversity of students. Activities such as school games, theatre and competitions are very favorable to this, since the students are not divided by classroom/grade.

As to the rules of the institution, testing the limits of the principal's tolerance, the limits of the vice-principals (one in the morning, class shift and one from the afternoon, tutorship shift) and the limits of the pedagogical coordinator is necessary for them to know how far they can go (to leave the school space, to fight in the classroom). For example, during a workshop, one of the students arrived wearing a cap, which is forbidden in the school. Knowing about prohibition, the student activated the pedagogical coordinator and got the permit to participate in the workshop with the support of the researchers in charge. Unfortunately for him, the vice-principal, much "tougher", caught him wearing cap and removed him from the school since the student refused to take it out. A second example, which demonstrates that the mastering of rule is necessary to infringe it, can be seen in the report of a student who falsified her mother's signature on the documentation that was sent to her family, because she wanted to participate in the photography workshop. This infringement was communicated to the researchers in charge of the workshop at the end of the event, when it was not possible to remove her anymore. In these two cases, the ethnomethods were clear.

Students who came from private schools reported their fear of a reduction in the educational quality in the new school, but, behind this worry, it was the fear of losing the status when passing from the private school to the public one. To deal with this loss, some made a point of talking publicly about their buying habits, about the last vacation spent in other cities and other behaviors that remind people, all the time, of a social better condition. The classmates, however, apparently, ignored their behavior, offering no reactions to it.

The permanence in the school implied, for many students, learning to take care of their school materials. The care about the pencils (that "disappear"), the backpacks (target of pranks, in some cases) and notebooks was mentioned and it means that the students cannot leave these objects in the classroom.

Learning to be in line in canteen and to wait for the school bus also results in ethnomethods, not always desirable, but they assure lunch and places in the bus, for example:

*In the morning, when the bus arrives, everybody stands up pushing one another. So, I begin to push. (AL50).*

*In the line itself, we were waiting for a long time and then somebody came and jumps the line. (AL108).*

*Aggressive people. The person is there and suddenly another person comes, slaps, and pushes. Or somebody puts the foot to make us fall. So I fight back. (AL35).*

## Our final considerations

By adapting the concept of affiliation for adoption in the transition from fifth grade (elementary school) to sixth grade (middle school), we wonder: Were their “institutional” or “intellectual” dimensions enough? Did the stages “strangeness, learning and affiliation” allow the analysis of the transition when the subject observed is an adolescent and not a youngster or a young adult? Our hypothesis, when we adapt the concept of affiliation to use it with these students, is that it is possible to observe the phases of strangeness, learning and affiliation in middle school

In the application of this concept in a research developed in a large school, we observe that it is possible to use and adapt the concept in the transition that was already mentioned. However, the proposed dimensions – relationships with rules, time, space and knowledge – were insufficient. It was necessary the creation of another dimension, the relation with the others.

The good transition between the grades is not a spontaneous process and it demands both individual effort and institutional effort. The students in the age group analyzed – between 11 and 14 years old – are in the adolescence with all the instabilities provoked by this other transition – from childhood to adolescence. Moreover, they depend on the friendship circle (and sometimes enmities) to manage to do the passage.

On the other hand, the institution needs to recognize the phases of strangeness and learning and act upon them, reducing elements of great strangeness and favoring those that facilitate the learning. It is fundamental that this decision be not only the decision of a school unit, but also the decision of the municipal school system. The process of transition is not limited to the arrival of the students in the sixth grade, but it starts in fifth grade, many times, offered in another school unit.

The municipal school system must be involved in the transition. The school unit needs to favor the coexistence of the students beyond the time of class. It is necessary to invest in adequate spaces in order to form and consolidate the friendship network, an important element of affiliation. The affiliation of sixth graders in basic education must be, therefore, the focus of the municipal public policies and it should not be restricted to the welcome initiatives of teachers and even schools.

The experience that was shared here about the adapted concept of affiliation from fifth grade to sixth grade is an invitation to other researchers, so that they can test the application of the concept and establish a dialogue.

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### Note on authorship

The four authors participated in the elaboration of the article, writing and reviewing it. Dantas, Jucá and Silveira also participated in structuring the text.

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