

# Learning and development of young people and adults: new social practices, new senses<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

This article discusses the influence of the schooling process in the mental and cultural development of students in education for young people and adults (EJA) based on questions constructed during a master's research titled *Education for young people and adults: new reading practices for constructing new identities*. The empirical study is situated in the accounts of the life stories and reading practices of students in a beginning class of literacy learning for young people and adults of Belo Horizonte municipal public system. These reports enabled them to build their discourses about their ways of being in the world and their social practices, now from the perspective of subjects included in the universe of written language. Moreover, they prompted some questions: What are the senses that young people and adults with little or no schooling build when they participate in the literacy process in school? Does the teaching of scientific and school concepts trigger mental and cultural developmental processes in young and adult illiterates? In order to try to answer such questions, we established a dialogue between the contributions of the cultural-historical psychology of Lev S. Vygotsky, the process of literacy and awareness of Paulo Freire and interactional ethnography. The analysis of aspects of mental and cultural development of one of the students - aspects gestated socially and discursively within and outside the school through the mediation of social and educational practices experienced in his educational process - reveals that the teaching of scientific and school knowledge allowed that student to have new social practices at work, at church and in the family, giving a new meaning to his condition of being in the world.

## **Keywords**

Learning – Development – Education for young people and adults.

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# ***Aprendizagem e desenvolvimento de jovens e adultos: novas práticas sociais, novos sentidos<sup>I</sup>***

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## **Resumo**

*O texto discute a influência do processo de escolarização no desenvolvimento mental e cultural de estudantes da educação de jovens e adultos (EJA) a partir de questões construídas no decorrer da pesquisa de mestrado intitulada Educação de jovens e adultos: novas práticas de leituras construindo novas identidades. O material empírico do estudo está situado nos relatos das histórias de vida e práticas de leitura dos estudantes de uma turma inicial de alfabetização de jovens e adultos da rede pública municipal de Belo Horizonte. Tais relatos possibilitaram-lhes a construção de discursos sobre suas formas de ser e estar no mundo e sobre suas práticas sociais, agora na perspectiva de sujeitos inseridos no universo da língua escrita. Além disso, instigaram algumas questões: Quais são os sentidos que jovens e adultos pouco ou não escolarizados constroem ao se inserirem no processo de alfabetização na escola? O ensino de conceitos científicos e escolares desencadeia processos de desenvolvimento mental e cultural nos jovens e adultos analfabetos? Com o propósito de tentar responder a tais perguntas, estabeleceu-se um diálogo entre as contribuições da psicologia histórico-cultural de Lev S. Vygotsky, do processo de alfabetização e de conscientização de Paulo Freire e da etnografia interacional. A análise de aspectos do desenvolvimento mental e cultural de um dos estudantes – aspectos estes gestados social e discursivamente, dentro e fora da escola, pela mediação das práticas sociais e educacionais experienciadas em seu processo de escolarização – revela-nos que a aprendizagem de conhecimentos científicos e escolares permitiu-lhe exercer novas práticas sociais no trabalho, na igreja e na família, ressignificando sua condição de ser e estar no mundo.*

## **Palavras-chave**

*Aprendizagem – Desenvolvimento – Educação de jovens e adultos.*

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This article discusses how the process of schooling can influence the mental and cultural development of students in education for young people and adults (EJA). It does so by raising questions such as: what are the senses that young people and adults with little or no schooling build when they participate in the process of literacy-learning in school? Does the teaching of scientific and school concepts trigger mental and cultural developmental processes in illiterate young people and adults? These questions were formulated in the course of a master's research as the students told their stories and described their reading practices, constructing discourses on their ways of being in the world and their social practices, now from the perspective of subjects who entered into the world of written language.

In order to try to answer such questions, we established a dialogue between cultural-historical psychology (VYGOTSKY, 2005, 2008; VYGOTSKY, LURIA, LEONTIEV, 2006), the process of literacy learning and awareness by Paulo Freire (1996, 2007, 2008) and interactional ethnography (SANTA BARBARA CLASSROOM DISCOURSE GROUP, 1993). The empirical study was conducted in a class of literacy learning for young people and adults of Belo Horizonte municipal public system and it focuses on the social practices of reading and their relations with the construction of multiple identities. Thus, the discussion presented in this article refers to excerpts of statements of one of the students interviewed.

### **EJA: a practice of freedom, a practice mediated by language**

To assist in the challenge, as already said, we adopted the perspectives of the propositions of Freire (1996, 2007, 2008) and Vygotsky (2005, 2006, 2008). These authors conceive human beings as subjects who are sociocultural, interactive, culture creators, and aware of their inconclusiveness, living in an environment historically and socially constructed by them in

conjunction with other members of their social groups. Also from this perspective, human beings are subjects of reflection and action, creation and reconstruction, in a constant transformation process in search for becoming human.

According to Vygotsky (2008), subjects are active and interactive, because they build knowledge and constitute themselves through interpersonal relationships. It is in the exchange with other subjects and with themselves that their knowledge, social roles and functions are gradually internalized, allowing the construction of new knowledge and the development of personality and consciousness.

Freire (2007, 2008) understands human beings as historical, social, unfinished beings, able to have not only their activity but also themselves as an object of consciousness. In the condition of *being*, human beings compare, value, intervene, choose, and decide, making themselves ethical.

These perspectives lead to understanding young people and adults who are illiterate and / or unschooled as historical, social and cultural subjects, equipped with knowledge and experience accumulated throughout life, who require the intervention of cultural institutions capable of triggering the development of their potential. They are therefore not objects depositories of knowledge, but individuals capable of constructing knowledge and learning.

Thus, Freire (2007, p. 20) believes that "every educational practice aims to go beyond where one is." Education should lead to new understandings, new challenges which lead to the search for new knowledge. It is a continuous process of understanding the world and one's relations with it in a changing reality, and it may become a practice of freedom (FREIRE, 2008) and a mediated practice (VYGOTSKY, 2008). Therefore, education should be structured in the relationship with others, through dialogue, constituting a learning situation in which subjects participate interactively in the process of knowing the world in which they live.

Therefore, the content of education is found in the reality experienced and the worldview of young people and adults. The pedagogical practice consists of an investigation on the thinking and a discussion of the worldviews expressed in the various ways of relating with others and with knowledge objects.

For these thinkers, learning has a social and historical nature, since it operates in interpersonal relationships situated in their own time and space. As a social process, learning occurs through dialogue, the use of language in instruction. In this process, subjects use their experiences and meanings to conduct an intellectual analysis, comparing, unifying and establishing logical relations. Thus, the concepts built throughout life undergo a process of transformation and resignification, establishing a new cognitive relation that results in the subsequent development of consciousness and of various internal thought processes, and in the reconstruction of concepts, which are now scientific (VYGOTSKY, 2008).

Continuing with Vygotsky (2008), knowledge of the world is always mediated by cultural practices, by the other and by language. Through the word, in relation with the other and with the world, we classify, cut up, group, represent and give meaning to our reality. From this perspective, human learning is essentially social and is processed in the interaction with others, as its constitutive elements interpenetrate themselves in the intellectual and cultural life of the group participants. The relationship between the individual and society is a dialectical process constructed and mediated by language; so it is both a social and a subjective process. Thus, teaching can foster mental development as socially developed contents of human knowledge and the cognitive strategies for their internalization are undertaken in social and educational interactions.

Influenced by Vygotsky's studies and works such as those by Cole (1996) and Vóvio (1999), we present studies that have not only contributed to research on cognitive

functioning in different cultures and cultural groups, but also enabled the resignification and construction of new knowledge from the sociocultural perspective. Those studies were conducted in order to investigate how educational practices limit or facilitate the development of higher psychological functions.

When studying the development of scientific concepts in childhood, Vygotsky developed some theoretical concepts and proposals for concrete solutions to learning problems in the educational sphere (VYGOTSKY, 2005; MOLL, 1996) which will aid our study.

Due to his early death, Vygotsky did not systematically study the mental development of adults. However, the attempt to establish relations with some assumptions developed by the cultural-historical psychology allows reflecting on aspects of the mental development of adults in the schooling process. One of his premises is that cognitive activities have a socio-historical nature and that the structure of mental activity changes throughout human development, because, according to Luria (1990, p. 24),

[...] the world of particular objects and of meanings of words which men receive from previous generations organizes not only perception and memory (thus ensuring the assimilation of experiences common to all mankind), but also provides some important conditions for further and more complex development of consciousness.

Thus, learning to use the linguistic systems and tools of their cultural group, young people and adults can develop new forms of activity, transforming such objects into cultural signs and becoming beings of rights and duties (FREIRE, 2008).

As noted by Vygotsky (2008), culture mediated by language enables the transformation of men from biological into social beings, replacing their innate functions and providing them with the use of cultural

tools and techniques beyond the limits of nature. Therefore, the ability of teaching and learning is a fundamental attribute of human beings. Thus, education is capable of developing subjects' potential and establishing itself as a historical expression and as growth of human culture (MOLL, 1996).

According to such perspective, the school is a cultural institution which has activities, attitudes and ways which are specific of being and belonging to that school culture. Situated in a literate society, the school is a space where there are various cultural practices and relations between the cognitive processes and semiotic tools created by human beings (OLIVEIRA, 1999).

In this text, we emphasize the schooling process on the grounds that it encompasses different cultural practices, which presuppose the learning not only of school subjects (reading, writing and calculation activities), but also of the meaning of being a student and being a teacher, and how the school works and is organized in terms of time and spaces. Moreover, the schooling process encompasses learning the language conveyed and valued by the school, the roles, rights, duties exercised and functions performed by participants in the school context.

The studies developed from this perspective (COLE, 1996; OLIVEIRA, 1999; MOURA, 1999) consider the possibility of the influence of schooling on the modes of cognitive functioning, because

[...] when schooled, individuals present a possibility of decontextualized thought, abstracted from personal experiences and concrete, immediate reality, unlike the individuals who are members of cultural groups with little or no-schooling, whose modes of intellectual functioning are supposedly stuck to the concrete immediate reality experienced. (MOURA, 1999, p. 102)

In EJA, young people and adults with little or no schooling - hence coming from a no

school culture - by joining the school, will have to enter into and interact with the institution's particular modes of operation. However, these subjects' learning begins long before attending school, once they learn how to handle the daily situations, needs and demands of contemporary society. So when they enter school, they have had experience with measurements, math, printed materials, spoken mother tongue, working tools and electrical and/or electronic devices.

Such learning occurred in interactions with other people, through questions, answers, instructions, information and imitation, enabling them to develop a repertoire of activities / abilities which allowed them to occupy their spaces within their social groups. This shows that "learning and development are interrelated from the first day of life of the child" (VYGOTSKY, 2008, p. 95) who young people and adults once were.

Therefore, it is noteworthy that when joining school, young people and adults who have already acquired informal knowledge will have access to school learning whose focus is the assimilation of fundamentals of scientific knowledge in a systematized way. Thus, this learning will produce something new in the mental development of these subjects (VYGOTSKY, 2008). Also according to Vygotsky, to understand the relation between one's learning ability and development process, one cannot stick to developmental stages. We corroborate this idea. Otherwise, how could one explain the learning and development that take place throughout life? How could one explain why they go through the same stages of understanding written language that children go through in the early literacy process? (GOMES; DALBEN; COSTA, 2009; ALBUQUERQUE, LEAL, 2004).

According to Vygotsky's propositions, there are at least two levels of development: the actual one and imminent one. In this article, we make use of the expression *zone of imminent development* instead of *zone of proximal development*, for agreeing with Zoia Prestes (2012) when she calls attention to the

translations of the concepts of development zones proposed by Vygotsky which have been made based on the translations into English (zone of proximal development). For the author, there are inaccuracies in these translations because they do not call attention to the importance of instruction as an activity which may or may not enable development, create conditions, but which does not guarantee development. Another aspect is that these relations of mediation through instruction are not limited to the relationship between teacher and student, or to school activities; on the contrary, they are also present in imitation and play. Therefore, as a translation of the Russian terms *zona blijaichego razvitia*, the author presents the expression *zone of imminent development*, which conveys the essential feature of the concept: the possibility of development rather than the immediacy or mandatory nature of its occurrence. Also according to this author, Vygotsky *does not* speak of zone of potential development, because development is not ready to be activated, but may or may not take place in function of the interactions or mediations of the others.

Vygotsky always discusses the concept of zone of actual or current development, which reflects what people already know how to do without help from others. That is, the level of actual development refers to the mental functions which have already matured “as a result of certain development cycles already completed” (VYGOTSKY, 2008, p. 95-96). So what a person does independently tells us that the functions for performing this activity have already matured. This is, therefore, a retrospective view of development. However, the author also showed that, with the collaboration of others, subjects can solve problems with degrees of difficulty higher than those standardized for the stage of mental development of their age. This difference is called *zone of imminent development* by Vygotsky (2008, p. 97). Such zone consists of

[...] the distance between the level of actual development, which is usually determined by the independent solution of problems, and the imminent development, determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

Therefore, if properly organized, learning can trigger various internal developmental processes which can only be operated when one interacts with others or in collaboration with peers. When they are internalized, these processes become part of the acquisitions of the subject’s development, which in turn become autonomous. The author then concludes:

Learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing psychological functions which are culturally organized and specifically human. (VYGOTSKY, 2008, p. 103)

Since developmental processes do not coincide with learning processes, since ones are converted into the others and since the two types are not performed to the same extent or in parallel, it can be stated that there are complex and dynamic relationships in the course of the processes of development and learning of young people and adults. Therefore, as previously announced, this study aims to show the senses that young people and adults construct when they learn how to read and write. It also aims to check whether the teaching of scientific and school concepts triggers mental and cultural development in them.

### **The research’s context of production**

The setting of this research is an EJA literacy classroom where young people and adults learn how to be and experience being students. Initially, such classroom is a space with desks in parallel rows, a whiteboard, a

teacher at the front and several posters of children's literacy<sup>1</sup> spread on the walls, which is no different from a room of any educational institution in our country. As students and the teacher come into this room, another scenario emerges: different voices, stories and life experiences, expectations and conceptions of what it is like to be a student, to be a teacher, to learn and teach intersect and approach. Right now, that group of people "turns into a 'class', a social group" (GOMES, 2004, p. 32) in which the teacher and the students begin to build opportunities for learning, meanings, senses, identities, differentiated and unique school stories (GOMES; MONTEIRO, 2005); stories like Antonio's<sup>2</sup>, which we shall now analyze to understand the complex process of cognitive development when young people and adults join or return to school.

In the study, we used research tools related to ethnographic methodology, such as participant observation, field notes, gathering and analysis of artifacts from the group, interviews, photographs, audio and video recordings, reading groups and conversation with the students and the teacher. It is noteworthy that filming in the classroom is part of the database of another research – of which the first author was a voluntary assistant – carried out from 2006 to 2008 and whose aim was to understand similarities and differences between the literacy processes of two classes: one for children and another for adults.

We conducted individual interviews with six students in the first semester of 2009. Such interviews became a tool for data generation. This material provided reflection and contrast with situations filmed in the classroom, and enabled the production of the participants'

discourses on their identities and their reading processes related to social uses and practices.

To select these six students, we observed processes of reading acquisition and the participation in the research conducted from 2006 to 2008. Furthermore, we used criteria which covered the diversities of gender, age, ethnicity and social class. At the time, all students had entered the world of work: five were employed and one was unemployed, two worked in the formal economy (driver and store surveyor) and four in informal economy without legal employment relationship (two maids, an itinerant seller and a seamstress). They were all migrants from rural areas, five from Minas Gerais State and one from Bahia State.

As it was not possible to visualize these students' social practices of reading in spaces other than the school (at home, at work and in other social groups to which they belong), their literacy modes became visible through their discourses (considering discourse as what one does and says in school). For us, the analysis of these discourses is not simply an analysis of form, in opposition to analysis of content or meaning; "rather, it is a dynamic and dialectical intertextual analysis as conceived by Bakhtin (1992), and it may mediate the connection between language and social context" (FAIRCLOUGH, 1993, p. 184).

Therefore, in the statements made in the interviews at the school, we sought to understand the subjects' ability to organize, abstract, and plan for future life as well as their ways of positioning themselves in the social groups they participate in. We also observed whether they seemed to have conditions to resignify and transform their educational practices, expanding and diversifying their social practices of reading and writing.

Thus, researching the discursive practices of this group meant to understand how language works in the interactions between the teacher and the students inside the classroom or in the schoolyard, whether or not they support the acquisition and development of other types

**1-** In the morning and afternoon, this space is used for 6 to 8 year-old children who are in the process of literacy. The classroom's decor and visual aids are part of children's world.

**2-** The student authorized us to disclose his real name for this study. All participants signed an informed consent for use of the information recorded in audio and obtained through images and written texts. They were aware of the research objectives and the strategies applied in each of the moments used in data generation.

of knowledge (academic knowledge, procedures for participation in events in development). Accordingly, we sought to understand how daily life in the classroom was constructed by these young people and adults through verbal and nonverbal interactions, because with these constructions students can enter school and learn. Thus, the classroom is seen as a class, a social group where teachers and students create opportunities for learning, meanings, identities, unique and differentiated school stories (GOMES; MONTEIRO, 2005), not being therefore only knowledge of school contents. Such space involves the construction of roles, rights, duties and obligations of each member of the group.

Therefore, the logic of this research is based on the theoretical and methodological assumptions of interactional ethnographic approach, characterized by an analytical perspective and focused on a specific aspect of daily life and cultural practices of this group. Engaging in a study from such an approach means taking a holistic and reflective perspective, seeking part-whole relations. Therefore, the purpose of this work is to make a *thick description* (GEERTZ, 1989) in search of the senses produced by the social group investigated (GREEN; DIXON; ZAHARLICK, 2005; CASTANHEIRA, 2004; CASTANHEIRA et al., 2001); it is to understand the senses and meanings constructed by these subjects concerning the influence of schooling on their mental developmental processes and also understand the social world in which such meanings are possible.

### **Schooling and literacy as new possibilities of being in the world**

We shall analyze some aspects of mental and cultural development of Antonio – one of the six EJA students participating in the research. Such aspects were gestated socially and discursively within and outside school

through the mediation of social and educational practices experienced in the schooling process. The analyzes of the development of the other students will be discussed in another opportunity.

It should be noted that the observation of the filming of the classes allowed realizing that the practice of literacy of the school in question is centered on encoding and decoding words, and is detached from any work on understanding the uses and functions of written language. However, despite the fact that this student's literacy focused on encoding and decoding, in his autobiographical narratives and in his testimonies, we sought to reconstruct evidence which would allow capturing the senses that he had built when he entered the process of literacy in school and checking how the teaching of scientific and school concepts had triggered mental and cultural developmental processes, influencing his social practices of reading and writing.

From this perspective, it is important to know a little about Antonio's schooling process. At the time of the research, he was 44 years old, married and father of three children (18, 21 and 22 years old) who had completed secondary education. Antonio understood he was a middle-class black person. At age 12, he studied for a short time at a school in the rural area of Minas Gerais, where he lived, because he had worked in farming with his father since he was 8. There he learned to sign his name. He gave up studying in the evening school, in the light of the oil lamp, because the school was far and he always got to it tired:

But, well, thirty years ago, for people there in the interior, it was more complicated to study. When I came from Monte Cruzeiro here... Here to Belo Horizonte, I knew nothing, because there I had to go, to go to school there I had to go on horseback... Over ten miles on horseback. That's a joke, right?

As seen, the sociocultural context experienced by Antonio reflects the historical



and cultural conditions which many Brazilians are subjected to, mainly the populations of African descent and people living in rural areas, characterized by inequalities in income levels and in socioeconomic, spatial, generational, ethnic and gender factors. All this combined influences negatively the access to schooling and produces sharp educational inequalities (HADDAD; DI PIERRO, 2000; GALVÃO; DI PIERRO, 2007). Moreover, cultural identities are constructed marked by *not knowing*. We can perceive this when Antonio says, “I came here not knowing anything,” recognizing that school knowledge could enable him to achievements beyond horseback riding or the daily work of those who live in the interior of Minas Gerais.

Antonio also tells us that in his childhood he was never encouraged to study. His mother died when he was 2 years old. His father, who raised him with the help of his eldest daughter, was illiterate. Like him, his siblings were not schooled until adulthood: a sister completed 5th grade and two sisters completed secondary education. However, despite Antonio’s encouragement, his eldest brother is still illiterate. His wife, who has studied up to 7th grade, motivated him to study to get a driver’s license because he already knew how to drive. With this purpose, in 2001, Antonio enrolled in the school in the municipal system where this research was conducted, as shown in the following excerpt from the interview:

I decided to get a driver’s license. I said to myself: For me to get a license, I have to study, right? Nobody gets a license not knowing how to read something, you have to know. And... I looked for the school for it, I looked for it and I came here, I studied here in 2000. Actually, I do not know whether it was in 2001... It was in 2001 that I studied here, I did the first grade with teacher Emilia<sup>3</sup>.

**3-** The teacher authorized us to use a fictitious name.

We observe, therefore, that the school for this student is a space where educational practices would allow him to access the knowledge accumulated by culture. And so he repositions himself as a subject who can benefit from this right, as he becomes aware of his illiterate condition and of his desire and right to learn written language to acquire a new position in society, working as a driver.

After he stopped studying in 2002 due to health problems, Antonio got an amateur driver’s license and then a professional driver’s license category D, by using what he learned in school about reading and writing. Moreover, he did a guitar course.

As he intended to become a pastor, at the time he was taking a course in Sunday school in order to “understand the Bible to preach, to convey the word”. He began lecturing in his church and others, which he was invited to, and even led Bible readings and gave sermons for about a hundred people. According to Freire (2008), reading the world, enouncing the world, by saying the word, human beings transform the world, assume the legitimacy of their language and of their speech. In this dialogue with themselves and with the others, in the intersubjectivity of consciousness, human beings resignify themselves as subjects and reconquer the world.

Aiming to extend his achievements, Antonio returns to the same school in 2008<sup>4</sup>, as he justifies:

I need to learn more... to have more knowledge... to further facilitate my work, to learn more, to develop my work further, you have to pursue... For example, work development, I mean, not to miss opportunities at work.

For him, developing himself was related to the process of school learning, since he established a direct relationship between

**4-** During this period, he began to participate in the study through filming in the classroom, reading groups and interviews.

learning, having knowledge and making progress at work. He said that “learning more”, “having more knowledge” could enable him to develop mentally and culturally, creating conditions to improve at work. Agreeing with Vygotsky (2008) and Luria (1990), we can relate this way of thinking to the links between school culture and work culture, since this relationship is mediated by language and cultural activities, creating opportunities for forming new identities.

At the time the study was conducted, Antonio worked as a driver for a marble company, traveling to Vitoria, Espirito Santo, to choose custom marble blocks. At work, he performed several social practices of reading and writing which gradually diversified and became more complex. This shows that the school, for him, had become an area of significant learning in the face of the new demands regarding the various contexts, roles, objectives and forms of interaction experienced in the social events organized and mediated by writing (VÓVIO, 2007). In his own words: “I know how to number the material, I know how to check the invoice, I know how to resolve invoice issues.” He also says:

I have to write the name of the material that I'm sorting out, the name of the place where I'll get it. Sometimes I have to measure something in a building... do you understand? I also work with that area of measurement, right? I have to write the number of the material, I have to write the apartment number, I have to write the name of the construction site, right? The name of the person responsible for the construction.

As the excerpt shows, Antonio uses his experiences and meanings to develop the skills of comparing, sorting, measuring, locating information, taking notes, that is, to do his work. These social practices are resignified and transformed when he learns to read and write, establishing a new cognitive and personal relationship which results in the

subsequent development of consciousness and various internal processes of thought, and in the reconstruction of school concepts and of himself (VYGOTSKY, 2008). With regard to this, Antonio recounts:

I think that after we attend classes, start learning... life changes. You begin to live a new life. And you get to see what you didn't see before. Because I think the person who... when you start to read... read... it is as if you were blind and then took that blindfold from your eyes and you began to see.

At this point, he makes explicit the personal, mental, social and cultural changes he has gone through since he began to see the world no longer from the perspective of those who do not read, but from that of those who can read the written code. We live in a world of writing, and such learning is a powerful tool to read the environment from other perspectives, to build reader identities and for people to be able to reconstruct themselves and their socio-cultural practices. Continuing the interview, the student also makes explicit the importance of the reading and writing functions and their social uses when he refers to his desire to always learn more and to his capacity for reflection:

You want to learn. You learn... learn... and die without knowing. But the more you learn, the better. About everything that happens in this country, out there, right? What you can do... What you can't do... If you can sign a document or not. This is very important, right? If you know how to read... you have to read what you're signing. And sometimes when people can't read anything and sign their names, they can sign their own conviction without being guilty of anything, right?

Researcher: And that was after you learned to read?

Antonio: Oh, that's for sure! Working and already having my... my own salary, I already worked, right? But knowing how to manage what I earn and buy things that I wanted, it was after I began to understand... I started writing down how much I could spend, how much I could not. Whether I could... spend thirty percent of my salary, whether I could spend fifty. If I have to buy something, some material, for example, if I want to buy that car over there... I have to write down how much I can spend, how much I cannot... That's what I just did when I bought my motorcycle. I filled in a form... I calculated how much I can spend this month, how much I cannot... I did the household budget... and what was left I put into savings, I bought my motorbike, I paid... I did it now that I bought a small car, I did the same thing. So I didn't know how to handle... the negotiation, right? I knew how to buy, pay and receive. But still... I didn't know how to deal with negotiating, managing my salary. For me it was important!

However, the construction of such learning and of the mental and cultural development of recording and calculating what one can spend, making negotiations, calculating the household budget and expenses, saving what is left and, finally, managing his salary did not occur singly. At school, Antonio declares the importance of the teacher's mediation for his learning process, as shown in this excerpt:

[...] when I entered the class, our teacher in the first year [inaudible word], she taught us, went to our desk, showed, taught... teaching us to join letters.

In fact, as pointed out by Vygotsky (2008), the teacher has to play the role of mediator between the student and the object of knowledge, intervening and promoting advances in mental development. For this, the

teacher must guide learning towards building opportunities for knowledge exchange and sharing between the teacher and the students and between the students themselves, allowing the creation of zones of imminent development which are related not only to the learning of school contents, but also to the construction of identities, self-concepts, recognition (PACKER, GOICOCHEA, 2000). Antonio also realizes the influence of the mediation of the other for his development process when he did the guitar course:

[...] I had already begun to grasp... Had already begun to learn... and through what the music teacher would tell me... show me... guide me, I got to understand the... these things.

Thus, the process of teaching and learning in a horizontal dialogical perspective can establish interpersonal relationships which aim to search for the solution to problematic situations and the development of potential through the mediation of one or more people who have already internalized the knowledge built. In this sense, Antonio proved able to learn from the other, which, in this case, consisted of the social groups in his guitar lessons, in the classroom itself and at church.

### **Final thoughts**

The analysis of the student's statements reveals diversity in his way of being, living, thinking and feeling. The narrative of his life story shows that, besides the universal nature, there are unique ways of being young and being an adult, because individuals, throughout their stories, build their psyche and recreate culture in a complex interaction between individuals, objects, symbols, meanings and worldviews shared by the cultural group in which they participate in a process of constant transformation and generation of singularities (VYGOTSKY, 2008; BRUNER, 2001; OLIVEIRA, 2008, 2001).

In the process of constructing his psyche and himself, the student's statements show the relevance of schooling to trigger the development of higher psychological functions (VYGOTSKY, 2008) and of new identities, positioning him as someone who can now negotiate and manage his own money, read the world and texts in a critical and fluent way.

Before entering school, Antonio had already built great linguistic, pragmatic and referential knowledge, and had already had access to different types of text genres. What he did not know, though often not completely, was the code of alphabetic writing and how to use and master these genres autonomously. The school offered him opportunities to unravel such code through procedures that have aided him establish relationships between what he already knew and what he learned, thus, contributing to his psychological development (VARGAS, 2010).

Antonio's story reaffirms that the school might be the place of cultural mediation where teaching provides students with the means of acquiring scientific concepts and of developing cognitive and operational abilities. It is known that this mediation occurs between the culture converted into school knowledge and the students, who are not only psychological subjects but also subjects with social practices, who live in a particular social and cultural group, and who are influenced by these factors in their ability to learn, their values and attitudes, language and motivations (LIBÂNEO, 2004).

From the analysis of the pedagogical practices developed in classroom, which were based on a traditional didactic context, as mentioned earlier, it is clear that Antonio was able to enhance his capacity for reflection and to expose problems and challenges, promoting significant learning and mental and cultural development. The educational and cultural practices he experienced at school led to the production and internalization of meanings,

favoring his cognitive, affective and moral development, which in turn triggered new understandings and new senses for everyday concepts constructed before he entered school. Undoubtedly, this development was provided by the learning of writing and of the school knowledge mediated in the relationship with the teacher and peers. Thus, such knowledge and *modus faciendi* stimulated the student's ability to reason and judge, improved his capacity for reflection and developed his skills to think and deal with concepts, to argue and solve problems in the face of the adversities of life. Furthermore, they allowed him to reflect on his own learning process, on the (re) construction of his identity as a reader of the world and of letters, as a guitar *player* and leader of the church he attended.

In this sense, we hope that this study will contribute to expand the content and goals of schooling, as well as to enrich curriculum proposals and teacher education methodologies, rethinking and requalifying the influence of the schooling process in the mental and cultural development of students.

At school, Antonio learned to think about knowledge itself – metacognition – that is, to relate with decontextualized knowledge and take it upon him to organize knowledge itself as an object of his reflection. This enabled him to use the tools and signs of the intellectual functioning typical of literate society (OLIVEIRA, 1992). Today, he no longer sees himself as *blind, ignorant, nervous, dependent*, ultimately, as what he called *being illiterate*. Undoubtedly, this development was promoted by the learning of writing, but also by the learning which enabled him to play the guitar and preach in the church, because, as Paulo Freire taught us, reading the word, *pronouncing* the world, he began to see himself as a subject able to *take the blinders off*, to be the protagonist of his story, to take on new challenges and take new positions in his personal and professional life.

After all, there is one certainty: in the schooling process of young and adult illiterates, learning to read and write goes beyond the strict process of literacy; it is a continuous learning of the wholeness of these subjects, establishing the world in which they are humanized, humanizing it. In other words:

[...] It is the reflective consciousness of the culture, the critical reconstruction of the human world, the opening of new paths, the historic project of a common world, the bravery to say one's word. (Freire, 2008, p. 12)

And this process has no limits.

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