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The educator in the space of Social Assistance policies: theoretical-methodological and ethical contributions

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Abstract

The article aims to offer a set of theoretical-methodological and ethical reflections, from the perspective of human and social development, which may subsidize the action of social educators who work in the field of public policies, specifically, social assistance Social Assistance policies, where this function has been taken on both by high school graduates and professionals from humanities courses. It is based on the assumption that the individuals who take on the role of social educators do not always feel prepared for a qualified performance with the beneficiaries of Social Assistance policies. It is based on the reflections of several thinkers, as well as on the assumptions of Socio-Historical theory. The intention is to offer social educators who work in a context of vulnerability and exclusion, a systematic reflection that can guide their practices from the perspective of technical competence, political commitment, and human sensitivity.

Keywords: Social educators. Public policies. Social assistance. Professional qualification.

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O educador no espaço das políticas de assistência social: aportes teóricos-metodológicos e éticos

Resumo

O artigo tem como objetivo oferecer um conjunto de reflexões de ordem teórico-metodológica e ética, na perspectiva do desenvolvimento humano e social, que possam subsidiar a ação dos educadores sociais que atuam no campo das políticas públicas, especificamente, das políticas de Assistência Social, no âmbito da qual tal função tem sido assumida tanto por indivíduos egressos do ensino médio quanto por profissionais oriundos dos cursos de humanidades. Parte do pressuposto de que nem sempre os sujeitos que assumem a função de educadores sociais sentem-se preparados para uma atuação qualificada junto aos beneficiários das políticas de Assistência Social. Fundamenta-se nas reflexões de diversos pensadores, bem como nos pressupostos da teoria Sócio-Histórica. A intenção é oferecer aos educadores sociais, que atuam em contexto de vulnerabilidade e exclusão, uma reflexão sistemática que possa nortear suas práticas numa ótica da competência técnica, compromisso político e sensibilidade humana. Palavras-chave: Educadores sociais. Políticas públicas. Assistência social. Formação profissional.



El educador en el espacio de las políticas de Asistencia Social: aportes teórico-metodológicos y éticos

Resumen

El artículo tiene como objetivo ofrecer un conjunto de reflexiones teórico-metodológicas y éticas, desde la perspectiva del desarrollo humano y social, que puedan subsidiar la acción de los educadores sociales que actúan en el campo de las políticas públicas, específicamente, las políticas de Asistencia Social, en las que esta función ha sido asumida tanto por individuos egresados de la escuela secundaria como por profesionales de provenientes de cursos de humanidades. Parte de lo presupuesto de que no siempre los sujetos que asumen el rol de educadores sociales se sienten preparados para una actuación calificada con los beneficiarios de las políticas de Asistencia Social. Se basa en las reflexiones de varios pensadores, así como en los supuestos de la teoría sociohistórica. La intención es ofrecer a los educadores sociales, que trabajan en un contexto de vulnerabilidad y exclusión, una reflexión sistemática que pueda orientar sus prácticas desde la perspectiva de la competencia técnica, el compromiso político y la sensibilidad humana.

Palabras clave: Educadores sociales. Políticas públicas. Asistencia social. Formación profesional.

Introduction

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In "A discourse on science", Santos (2013) speaks of a present populated by a past that has not yet passed and, on the other hand, by a future that, although on the horizon, has not yet arrived. Although the Portuguese author is referring to the territory of science, the observation could be used for a reflection on the reality of the Social Assistance policy in the Brazilian territory, in a present that we can glimpse the same shadows of a past that we have not yet stopped living and of a future that we think we have already lived, but that, nevertheless, insists on not arriving.

Indeed, the trajectory of Social Assistance policy throughout Brazilian history shows a process of substitution, not yet entirely completed, of a model based on practices of charity, philanthropy and favor (our past that still resists), for another model, founded on the idea of social protection and the institutional role of the State, as printed in the 1988 Federal Constitution (the future that has not yet materialized, but get closer in the current context of Social Assistance policies).

In this regard, Alberto, Freire, Leite, and Gouveia (2014) emphasize that the inclusion of Social Assistance in the 1988 Constitution represented a



breakthrough and a rupture with the conception of Social Assistance as punctuality actions of assistance and philanthropism – which reinforces the ideology of guilt and meritocracy –, aimed at the portion of the Brazilian population that is needy and underprivileged.

Breaking with this assistance model, characterized by the punctuality and discontinuity of actions and also by its paternalistic and demagogic character, the 1988 Federal Constitution proposed the necessary articulation of Social Assistance with Health and Social Security, thus constituting the Brazilian Social Security System. In 1993, after the Organic Law of Social Assistance, Social Assistance became recognized as a public policy, a right of all and a duty of the State, whose actions became systematized in the National Policy of Social Assistance – PNAS (in Portuguese abbreviation), approved in 2004, and in the Unified System of Social Assistance – SUAS (in Portuguese abbreviation), established in 2005 (ALBERTO; FREIRE; LEITE; GOUVEIA, 2014).

For Alberto, Freire, Leite and Gouveia (2014), the Unified System of Social Assistance represents a management model that favors the operationalization of the rights ensured in the Constitution and the social protection mechanisms. In turn, Jaccoud, Bichir, and Mesquita (2017) emphasize that the Unified System of Social Assistance not only established the bases for the organization of the Social Assistance policy, even defining the responsibilities of the different federative entities, but also instituted the three levels of security: income, family interaction and welcoming. The first receives assistance benefits, unrelated to contributions, such as the Continuous Cash Benefit – BPC, and the Family Grant Program – PBF; and the others (family interaction and welcoming) attended by services organized at different levels of complexity.

Regarding the services structured under the Unified System of Social Assistance, it should be noted that there are three levels of complexity present in the Social Assistance policy: low complexity, served by the Social Assistance Reference Centers – CRAS (in Portuguese abbreviation); medium complexity, called Special Social Protection, provided by the Specialized Social Assistance Reference Centers – CREAS (in Portuguese abbreviation); and high complexity, served by a public and private network directed to specific audiences and demands (JACCOUD; BICHIR; MESQUITA, 2017).

The Reference Centers for Social Assistance – CRAS function as the gateway to the Social Assistance policy, being responsible for offering services



to families, groups and individuals in situations of social vulnerability in the territory (ALBERTO; FREIRE; LEITE; GOUVEIA, 2014). The Specialized Reference Centers for Social Assistance – CREAS, on the other hand, are responsible for the special social protection of medium complexity, acting to assist individuals, families, and social groups marked by the violation of their rights, but whose family and community ties are not yet broken (DIAS, 2015).

This article aims to offer a set of theoretical, methodological and ethical reflections to social educators working in the field of Social Assistance policies, as a subsidy to the actions of these professionals from the perspective of human and social development.

In the scope of Social Assistance policies, the function of “social educator” has been taken on both by individuals graduating from high school, as advocated by the Basic Operational Norm of Human Resources – NOB-RH/SUAS – 2006 (BRASIL, 2006), and by professionals coming from humanities courses. Just as an example, and taking the State of Paraíba as a reference, 27 vacancies were offered for the function of social educators in the last public notice for the composition of the Specialized Social Assistance Reference Centers teams with the requirement of higher education in the humanistic area: Pedagogy; Psychology; Social Work; Sociology; Philosophy; Anthropology; Occupational Therapy and Literature.

Based on the above, we consider social educators to be both mid-level workers and professionals who take on this role at the different levels of complexity of the Social Assistance Reference Centers (CRAS, CREAS, and others).

Some researchers (SOUZA; FREITAS; SANTOS, 2015) have emphasized the need for training and improvement of social educators, given the lack of theoretical subsidies that support and ground their practice, especially from the point of view of emancipatory perspective.

When analyzing Resolution No. 09/2014 (BRASIL, 2014), it is noted that the performance of the “social educator” involves socio-educational activities aimed at ensuring rights, protection and strengthening of ties, autonomy, self-esteem and social participation.

It is, therefore, an educational practice at the service of social transformation and of new forms of subjectivity and sociability construction marked by the recognition, by individuals and groups, of the “right to have rights” and of the necessary engagement and mobilization to modify the perverse structures



that prevent the full human development in the different territories of life and work.

The performance of the duties established for the “social educators” presupposes the knowledge and handling of a set of theoretical categories that allow them to approach human suffering in the dimension of individual and collective subjectivities. This, without losing sight of the links, not always visible, between suffering and the socio-political, economic, and cultural structures that favor its emergence and reemergence in different conditions and contexts. In this way, facing suffering in its individual or collective form, it would be possible to perceive its sociopolitical roots as an expression of the “social issue” whose foundations are found in the inequality and exploitation typical of capitalist societies.

To theoretical knowledge, it is necessary to associate an ethical position that enables the reception, active and extended listening, as well as the appreciation of individuals and collectivities seeking, on the one hand, to recognize the subjective implications of poverty, marginalization and social exclusion and, on the other hand, to rescue the power of action and political joy of individuals and social groups marked by processes of exclusion and social vulnerability (BRAZIL, 2011).

Finally, in search for a qualified performance, “social educators” must develop technical competence, that is, the ability to manage knowledge in order to offer effective answers to the challenges posed by their daily work in contexts of poverty, precariousness, and social vulnerability. To this end, it is also essential to use active and participative methodologies that, anchored in a theoretical perspective, can guide the daily work in achieving the established objectives and goals.

There are, therefore, many challenges for the work of “social educators” within the current Social Assistance policy. This article presents reflections that intend to serve as guidelines and orientations for the practice of these professionals.

Methodologically, we made use of “narrative review”, understood, according to Cordeiro, Oliveira, Renteria and Guimarães (2007), as a type of bibliographical research in which the selection of the corpus is made in an arbitrary way, being up to the researchers to decide which articles and authors are relevant, given the absence of systematic criteria for the search and analysis of the material. In a narrative review, knowledge is subject to the selection



bias adopted – consciously or unconsciously – by the authors. The present text expresses our affiliation and positioning in the ethical-political field occupied by researchers engaged in world transformation and the consequent emancipation of subaltern individuals and social groups.

The text is structured in three axes. The first is for theoretical contributions and is subdivided into two parts: the first deals with the concepts of precariousness and social vulnerability, ethical-political suffering, and social protection; in the second part, we seek to explain the main categories of the Socio-Historical theory – individual, context and individual-society dialectics, and local-global context. Theoretically, this axis is anchored in the reflections of Judith Butler, Vygotsky, Luria, and Bakhtin.

In the second axis, we offer a reflection around some methodological guidelines focused on the “empowerment of action”, whose basic assumption is the belief in human agency and in the capacity of collective mobilization to face situations that favor processes of social exclusion. In this discussion, we will resume Paulo Freire’s reflections, as well as the relevance of art and the project of life for the educational work with individuals in vulnerable situations.

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Finally, in the third axis of the article, we make some notes about the ethics that should underpin the personal and professional positions of social educators based on the theoretical contributions formulated by Martin Buber and Carl Rogers.

The intention, as already explained, is to offer “social educators” who work in contexts of vulnerability and exclusion – as is the case of the Social Assistance policies – a systematic reflection that may guide their practices from a viewpoint of technical competence, political commitment and human sensitivity (MELO, 1998).

Theoretical Guidelines

In Rousseau's thought, the sciences and the arts as well as morals would have arisen in an attempt to delimit the field of social policies, Pereira (2008) considers them a “species” of the “public policies” genre, emphasizing their public and therefore universal character (within the scope of the State) and defining them as State action aimed at responding to social demands and needs arising



from society. They are policies that have as their horizon the concretization of rights conquer by society, through programs and services.

In the same direction, Simões (2012) emphasizes that the Organic Law of Social Assistance – Law 8.742/1993 (LOAS, in Portuguese abbreviation), as an expression of social policy, should ensure assistance to the population as a right to citizenship, having systematized and institutionalized as permanent the assistance services to families in situations of vulnerability and social risk.

Such situations of vulnerability and risk affect, in a special way, some social subgroups that start to demand an active attitude from the State, in the sense of materializing the social rights founded under the prism of equity and social justice (PEREIRA, 2008).

An effective and efficient action with such individuals, and in the perspective of social emancipation, demands from social educators an expanded understanding of the beneficiaries of social policies and of the context of action, for which it is necessary the appropriation of concepts/categories that “open doors”, forcing the windows of one’s own thinking and thus allowing the broadening of horizons that make it possible to see further. In this sense, we present three key categories that should underpin the educational work in the scope of Social Assistance policies because they contribute to the apprehension of the life and work context of the beneficiaries of these policies: “vulnerability”, “precariousness” and “ethical-political suffering”.

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The political dimension of human vulnerability/precarity

In “Precarious Life”, Butler (2015) discusses vulnerability as constitutive of life itself. Life is itself vulnerable. It is a common vulnerability, since it is shared with other human beings and, in the limit, with other living beings. In this sense, vulnerability appears initially as a mark of the human condition itself, a mark that cannot be overcome and that is expressed in the mortal nature of life and, therefore, in the possibility of being wounded, either physically or morally. In Butler’s (2015, p. 46) words, “[...] lives are by definition precarious: they can be purposely or accidentally eliminated; [...] it is by no means guaranteed. In a sense, this is the characteristic of all lives [...]”. And further: “[...] to live is always to live a life that is vulnerable from the start” (BUTLER, 2015, p. 52).



Although it seems that the terms precariousness and vulnerability are used as synonyms, the former ontologically precedes the latter. Thus, it is because life is precarious, fragile, poor; because it comes into the world with few resources, that also it becomes vulnerable, susceptible to being hurt. It is important to emphasize that there is, here, the recognition of an ultimate precariousness/vulnerability that involves life in all its forms. A condition, as said, that we share with other human beings and other living beings.

From the recognition of constitutional precariousness and vulnerability, results the construction of a social network in order to guarantee the essential conditions and care without which life suffers. This is what Butler (2015) calls conditions of life: they are conditionalities historically and socially created to sustain life, enabling it to expand at increasingly complex levels of quality.

The social network to which Butler (2015) refers can be understood as the set of human objectifications, the result of the work of men and women in response to the precariousness/vulnerability at first. Among these objectifications, Butler (2015) highlights the importance of political entities, including economic and social institutions that aim to meet human needs, coming to the aid of the precariousness of existence and, in this sense, reducing the risk of injury and death, consequently, reducing the precariousness/vulnerability without ever completely cure them, since the physical constitution of living beings and, in this sense, also of human beings, makes them fated to suffering and, in the limit, to death.

The use of the notion of “social network” in Butler (2015) resonates with the notion of “protection network” used in the field of Social Assistance as a device for the operationalization of public policies. The idea is to highlight the need for articulated and intersectoral work aimed at ensuring social protection and comprehensive care to beneficiaries of social public policies. In this sense, the social network can be thought of as a social construct that has the functionality of supporting individuals and groups, protecting them from some forms of suffering, delaying and/or minimizing the impact of the inevitable sufferings that are part of the human condition.

But if it is possible to reduce the precariousness/vulnerability of life by creating favorable conditions for its development, it is also possible to increase levels of precariousness and vulnerability related to the lack of access to those social conditions that favor, sustain, protect, and guarantee life. This is the



political dimension of precariousness that goes beyond its constitutional dimension because it is related to the social processes that, ultimately, potentiate the first precariousness/vulnerability.

From the unequal distribution of the set of human objectifications, it results, on the one hand, that certain lives (individuals, groups, populations) are very well protected by having easy access to such objectifications; while other lives, "[...] no gozan de un apoyo tan inmediato [...] y no se calificarán incluso como vidas que 'valgan la pena'" (BUTLER, 2009, p. 58). For the latter, the constitutional dimension of precariousness/vulnerability is secondary to its political dimension. In this process, precarity/vulnerability emerges as a socially and politically constructed condition, being characterized by the deficiency in the social and economic support network and the consequent exposure, differentiated and unprotected, of individuals, groups, and populations to violations, diseases, poverty, hunger, violence etc. (BUTLER, 2015).

In "Frames of war", Butler (2015, p. 15) starts from the observation of the existence of individuals "[...] who are not exactly recognizable as individuals [...]" and of "'lives' that are hardly – or, rather, never – recognized as lives". The author refers to prisoners of war, but also to women, gays, immigrants, refugees etc. This is a growing contingent of human beings relegated to the condition of "redundant", "waste", "superfluous" and "garbage" – to parody Bauman (2005).

Vulnerability is related to situations of social unprotection, typical of contexts marked by poverty, income deprivation, and lack of access to services and collective goods that maximize human helplessness and, ultimately, have their genesis in the structural inequality prevailing in the capitalist production mode, whose fundamentals is the exploitation and maximization of profit to the detriment of people.

However, it is important to emphasize that situations of helplessness and social unprotection, characterized by the absence/insufficiency of income, goods, and the lack of access to services, also tend to affect family and community ties, marking them with the sign of precariousness and making certain individuals, groups, and populations more vulnerable to sexual and labor exploitation, as well as to situations of violence, discrimination, prejudice, and – not rarely – physical extermination.



Vulnerability/insecurity and the emergence of ethical-political suffering

The processes of social exclusion and vulnerability tend to be experienced, at the individual level, in the form of ethical-political suffering (SAWAIA, 2001), understood as that which has its genesis in sociopolitical and cultural structures that diminishes and subordinate individuals and social groups, reducing them to the condition of stateless persons. Such suffering must be read as a subjective expression of social issues, thus portraying the humiliation and pain of those who are daily diminished and treated as socially useless.

Heller (1979, apud SAWAIA, 2001) makes a distinction between pain and suffering, emphasizing that the former is constitutive of the human condition and that it has its source in the individual and in the affections of the bodies, that is, in the capacity of the individuals to feel and be affected. Suffering is the pain that emerges, in the individual, as an expression of social injustices and oppressions that materialize in hunger, prejudice, discrimination, humiliation etc.

Many of the individuals and groups that seek Social Assistance have their existence marked by the sign of ethical-political suffering. Their complaints, even when they are expressed at an individual or family level, refer to injustice conditions whose origins must be sought in the collective, that is, in the perverse structures of a social organization whose production of wealth walks vis a vis the production of poverty/misery for an ever-larger contingent of the human population.

Dialectical thinking allows us to go beyond the individual and local contexts, by pointing to the relationship between the individual and the social, the micro and the macro, allowing the recognition that subjectivities are historically and socially forged; and that the local is a punctual expression of forces, logics, and regional and global processes that cross and shape it. At the same time, dialectical thinking does not authorize any kind of unaccountability of the individual and the local contexts, any kind of determinist thinking that would lead to a folding of arms, in a posture characteristic of those who believe that "nothing can be done".

Thus, on the one hand, it is necessary to recognize the presence, in the specific (local) contexts, of economic, political, and socio-cultural forces that, originating in decision-making centers (the macro spaces of politics and the



market), favor the unequal structuring of territories, some of them marked with the sign of development and progress, and others with poverty, precariousness, and vulnerability. However, the dialectical perspective also allows for the understanding that changes at contextual (local) level also contribute to the alteration/change in the relations of forces of the broader contexts. It is the local-global dialectic of which Santos (1995) speaks to us and which allows us to understand that change in the world necessarily goes through change in our own backyard.

On the other hand, it is also important to approach the individual and his individuality in a dialectical way, recognizing that subjectivity is forged intersubjectively and that values, emotions, and feelings are experienced by individuals, but have their genesis in intersubjective encounters that are socially structured, as pointed out by the concept of habitus, forged by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1989).

The individual-society dialectic, as addressed by the Socio-Historical theory (Vygotsky, Luria, Bakhtin), whose foundations are the reflections of Marx, allows the rescue of the active and historical dimension of the social being, thought as who, through work, acts on nature transforming it and transforming himself in this process. As Marx specifies, men and women make history, although under conditions not chosen by them (MARX, 2011). In the scope of these reflections, human beings are not treated/thought a given idea, done once and for all, but as individuals in the process of becoming, individuals that are constituting themselves, making themselves, while building and making history.

Moreover, when speaking of human individuals, the Socio-Historical theory does not refer to abstract individuals, holders of an alleged humanity. On the contrary, it is about understanding men and women in the concreteness of their existences and in the context of the historicity in which they move and in which humanization appears as a project, the materialization of which demands the daily struggle against dehumanizing and brutalizing situations, characterized by the alienation that generates antagonism between a significant portion of individuals and social groups and the set of human objectifications, favoring the ethical-political suffering of those who, deprived of access to goods and services, are not seen, nor see themselves, as those who accompany the historical process.

The “social educators” who work in the scope of Social Assistance policies find in the categories outlined here – precariousness, vulnerability,



ethical-political suffering, individual, subjectivity, context – heuristic instruments that allow them a qualified insertion and intervention from the perspective of human and social development. It is important to emphasize the interdependent, relational, and dialectic character of these categories that cannot be thought/used in isolation, nor reduced to a single dimension. Thus, it is not possible to think of the local isolated from the global or the individual independent from society, and the opposite is also true. Only when used relationally and dialectically do such categories allow the capture of the movement of the real in its historicity, contradictoriness, and complexity.

Methodological Guidelines

The educational work with the various publics involved in social policies (children, young people, the elderly, women, people with disabilities, among others) must be guided by the transformation of the social, political, cultural, and economic conditions that tear apart the human bonds (family, community) and generate ethical-political suffering that is expressed both physically and mentally.

12 In this sense, it is important to adopt a methodology that promotes the unveiling of the political, social, and economic factors that are at the root of poverty, hunger, and misery. A methodology that, starting from the pains and discomforts experienced by the different individuals, promotes the recognition of their root causes, preventing the blame process that afflicts them and that is expressed in phrases like these: "It's our fault, our so great fault!" Or: "We are immersed in this current situation because we don't work, we have many children, we didn't study etc. etc. etc." It is important to remove the burden of this guilt that weighs on them and prevents them from recognizing themselves as expropriated individuals, prevented from being; condemned to an inhuman existence, to a "naked" life (AGAMBEN, 2000). Through problematization, the exercise of criticality, it is possible to denaturalize relations and connections – often naturalized in everyday life – allowing the emergence of other possibilities of meaning, social interactions and ways of life (XIMENES; BARROS, 2009).

Paulo Freire, in many of his writings, emphasized the movement from naive awareness that relates misery, poverty, hunger, and death to the will of supernatural beings ("it is God's will!") to critical awareness that starts to see the perverse and not always visible links between poverty, misery, and social



organization. The educator from Pernambuco warned that the emergence of critical consciousness was important, but that it should blossom towards a critical-transforming consciousness, characterized by the mobilization and the consequent search for transformation of iniquitous structures that continuously generate poverty, misery, suffering, and pain for a significant contingent of humanity that, in this process, dehumanizes itself.

Sawaia (2009) emphasizes that the contexts of vulnerability are marked not only by ethical-political suffering, but also by the resistance that is expressed in the immense desire to be happy, in the thirst to be more, an expression of the authentic vocation of human beings (FREIRE, 1987). It is up to the social educators who work in these contexts, therefore, to work in the sense of empowering the action of individuals and social groups served by the Social Assistance policies.

In this sense, the use of art, in its various forms, stands out. It is necessary to educate the look and the sensitivity, favoring possibilities to paint, sing, dramatize, and poetize pain, lamentation, humiliation, but also joy, small signs of hope and, above all, indignation, revolt, dreams, and utopia. In this way, we can find, as Fantin (2005, p. 10) points out, "[...] inside so many difficulties, small gestures, with brushes, with earth, with seeds, needles and lines, drums to cross the great wall of this neoliberalism that has been installed in our lives [...]" and that produces so much ethical-political suffering for the condemned of the land.

Photography, as well as painting, collage work, theater and other artistic expressions allow the several publics from Social Assistance to see themselves, recognize themselves, make visible the pains and laments present in daily life, but above all invent/construct new possibilities of existence (the neighborhood/city we have and want), opening spaces for dreams and utopia.

How can we forget Freire (2000) when, in his letter about the right and the duty to change the world, he says that the transformation of the world is not detached from dreams and projects, fed by the recognition of the historical, political, and economic conditions that affect us, and by the certainty that, because we are not determined, human beings – women and men – can engage in the fight to transform the realities that cause suffering, unease, and death.

Education, the educator from Pernambuco reminds us, when carried out from the perspective of the disinherited of the world, has the function of enabling



and favoring the critical insertion of individuals in the world; the capacity for intervention, for creating alternatives to face the challenges posed by the burden of our historical time and our peculiar condition of existence (FREIRE, 2000).

In "Invisible Cities", Calvin (2003) presents a dialogue between Marco Polo and the Great Khan about hell and the way not to suffer. An excerpt from that dialogue reads:

The hell of the living is not something that will be, if it exists, it is the one that is already here, the hell in which we live every day, which we form, being together. There are two ways not to suffer. The first is easy for most people: accept hell and become part of it to the point of no longer perceiving it. The second is risky and requires attention and continuous learning: trying to know how to recognize who and what in the midst of hell is not hell, and to preserve him, and to make room for him (CALVINO, 2003, p. 158).

Recognize who and what, in the middle of hell, is not hell. This is a challenge for education together with individuals marked by processes of precariousness and social vulnerability. Educating to look at life, life itself, the places where life unfolds: the neighborhood, the city. And even the non-places, aiming to identify the seeds of hope, the defenseless flowers, the spaces where life still pulsates: the small gestures inscribed in everyday life; small and large personal and collective actions that establish the difference; institutions and formal and informal spaces that, on a daily basis, welcome, protect, care for, and promote solidarity, sharing, justice, love, joy, and point to the concreteness of the new.

Besides art, the work with sensitivity, the education of the gaze, it is indispensable to promote life projects, whether in the personal, family, or community sphere. The work with "life projects" is an indispensable strategy for educators who follow – in the scope of the Social Assistance Reference Centers – adolescents who are serving social-educational in open conditions. However, the "life project" must and can be worked with the different publics of the Social Assistance policies, especially when it is assumed not only in an individual dimension, but also in a social-community one, which makes it possible to talk about life project in the scope of the family and the community.

To project oneself, to launch oneself into the future, is proper to the human being, as a desiring individual (RIOS, 2004). Through this project, men and women actively insert themselves in the world, facing the challenges and



limits posed by the set of material and political conditions that oppress them and restrict their freedom and humanity (CATÃO, 2001).

Ethical Guidelines

The individuals that constitute the target audience of Social Assistance policies are marked by a history of bad encounters. It is important, therefore, to promote good encounters, to work on the relationship in work groups and in spaces for coexistence. Good encounters are those in which the individuals are accepted in their singularities, without moral judgments, without prejudices. Therefore, the importance of the ethical dimension in the work of the educator who works in the scope of Social Assistance policies.

The ethics we are dealing with here is an ethics of encounter, of otherness, of trust in the human being that inhabits us and looks forward to grow, to self-actualize, to be happy, to be more, in a word (FREIRE, 1987), even in the most precarious and vulnerable contexts, as the poet wrote: "Even curled up with dust, inside the coldest night, the life that goes with me is fire: it is always on fire" (MELLO, 2009, p. 21). We sought in the reflections of Martin Buber and Carl Rogers some guidelines for thinking about ethics in the educational process with the public of the Social Assistance policies.

Born in Germany, in 1878, Martin Buber's academic life spans the period from 1900 to 1960, having been influenced by the political and cultural context prevailing in the first decades of the 19th century, marked by the World War I and by a situation of ethical deprivation.

In 1923, Buber's best-known work, "Ich und du" (Me and you), was published, which is based on an ontology of relationship. In this work, Buber presents two pairs of words: I-Thou and I-This, which he calls principal words. They are principal words because they reveal a certain human position in the world. Thus, the meaning of the world for a given individual is closely related to the attitude, therefore, to the principal word. It is worth pointing out that, for Buber (2001), the word is not something empty, but something that is embodied and expressed in our positions and attitudes in our daily lives. It is, therefore, a word incarnated in the life of the individual. Therefore, we must look for it in practice, in action, in concrete attitudes.



There are two principal words: "I-Thou" and "I-This". The first takes the other (the alterity) as an equal, since he who says "Thou" refuses to place the other in the condition of an object and, in this way, renounces possessing. It is impossible for an "I" to possess a "Thou", since to say "Thou" is to put the otherness in the place of another "I", thus opening oneself to relation. The second word "I-This" establishes the world of objects, opening space for possession, for manipulation and, therefore, for an objectifying relationship that allows the use and instrumentalization of the other, who becomes an object (BUBER, 2001).

For Buber (2001), human existence takes place in the tension and articulation between the two attitudes. However, if it is impossible for any person to live entirely without the "this", the one who lives this way is not fully human, since the human world is established in the "I-Thou" relationship, characterized by dialog, reciprocity and encounter. The encounter, in Buber (2001), is an essential relationship, an event that occurs in presence, it is the effect of grace/miracle, since nothing we do can guarantee that the encounter will actually occur, although we must always do everything, like the host who arranges the house and sets the table to receive the expected guest. There is no encounter without openness, yet openness per se does not guarantee the encounter.

As in Freire's work, dialogue is also central in Buber. Established by the "I-Thou" relationship, dialogue presupposes the becoming present of the partners, in their non-reduction to sameness, but in the recognition and acceptance of reciprocity and the radical otherness of the other.

We suggest that Buber's reflections (2001) on the "I-Thou" relationship may contribute to rethinking, in an ethical dimension, the postures and attitudes of educators who work in the field of Social Assistance policies, in the sense of recognizing and engaging in a dialogical practice marked by the acceptance of otherness and by the search for the promotion of true encounters in the "I-Thou" relationship, understood as the only genuinely human relationship.

We believe that the reflections of the American psychologist Carl Rogers can also contribute to thinking about the ethical dimension of the educational work with the target audience of the Social Assistance policies, especially because of his belief in dialogue and in the potential of the human person marked by a potency of actualization, which brings him closer to both Buber and Freire, for whom human beings are called to be more.



Rogers (2009) shares the thesis that when they find a suitable kind of relationship, human beings tend to discover in themselves the capacity to use that relationship for their personal growth, change, and development. For him, the kind of relationship that favors personal development and growth should be conducive to dialogue, encounter, and learning, and can be characterized by attitudes of: (a) trust, whose basis is the belief in the human being of the vocation to be more; (b) acceptance – which implies in becoming open to the other, welcoming him in his radical otherness; (c) empathy, and (d) authenticity/congruence, that is, the renunciation of “masks”, dissimulation, and secrets.

We believe that the reflections of Buber (2001) and Rogers (2009) point to the importance of educators who work in the Social Assistance spaces undressing themselves of a teacher image, exercising the substitution of the “I-Thou” relations in which the target-public of these policies are objectified. They are treated as mere receptacles of orders and information or even infantilized by “I-Thou” relations, permeated by the acceptance of otherness and by an attitude of permanent dialog, making room for a humanizing process of both the individuals assisted and the educators themselves, who recognize themselves as learners in this process.

Final Considerations

The Social Assistance policies in Brazil increasingly demand the presence of “social educators”. Since this profession is not yet regulated in Brazil, the role of “social educators” has been taken on by high school graduates and also by professionals from the humanities courses like Pedagogy, Sociology, Anthropology, Social Service, Psychology, and undergraduate programs.

However, the individuals who take on the role of “social educators” do not always feel prepared for a qualified performance in the Social Assistance policies, a field still marked by the tension between conservative projects – which seek to reduce this policy to the dimension of favor welfarism and paternalism – and progressive projects committed to the transformation of the conditions that produce and legitimize poverty, misery and social inequalities and with the consequent search for the emancipation of the individuals in a perspective of the expansion of citizenship and democracy. Thus, acting in the aforementioned field implies the political commitment of the professional and the refusal of a



neutral posture, since such neutrality only confirms the communion with the interests of those who seek to make Social Assistance policies a space at the service of the maintenance of social inequities that generate ethical-political suffering.

In this sense, the present text seeks to initiate a much-needed debate about the theoretical, methodological and ethical contributions that should support the work of “social educators” in the field of Social Assistance policies and in the perspective of a critical work in the service of social transformation in favor of building the “beauty of the world”, to use Paulo Freire’s expression.

In the construction of this text, we were encouraged not by the temptation of presenting a ready-made recipe, but by the hope of pointing out some clues from which it would be possible to open paths, recognizing that, as the poet says, the path is made by walking.

We hope this text can serve as an introduction and, who knows, as the beginning of a wider dialogue with “social educators”, males and females, who, at this moment, work in the scope of Social Assistance policies in all corners of this immense country.

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