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Educação e diferenças culturais: práticas educativas fronteiriças na educação básica

Educación y diferencias culturales: prácticas educativas fronterizas en la educación básica

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Abstract: The text addresses the meaning policies regarding boundaries and cultural negotiation produced in the educational practices of Basic Education teachers in the relation with the cultural differences that trespass everyday school life. It is part of a study aimed at understanding how Primary Education teachers signify cultural differences in their educational practices. It is a qualitative study with an (auto)biographical approach, in dialogue with the Cultural Studies in education, using educational practice journals, narrative interviews, and the biographical workshop for collecting information. The study revealed the experience with the differences in school in articulation with the cultural changes woven by clashes, conflicts, affirmation, denial, and negotiations. The results pointed towards different boundary spaces in the relationship between Education and differences, in which the movement and negotiation of meanings are essential to the formative process of teachers and students. Regarding the educational practice, the teachers narrate their experiences by placing them between the rigid boundary, with limitations, free from conflicts, denial, or resignation with differences; and the moving boundary, with the construction of spaces so that differences can be triggered, challenged, and problematized.

Keywords: Educational Practices, Differences, Narratives, Elementary School.

Resumo: O texto discute as políticas de sentido construídas acerca das fronteiras e da negociação cultural produzidas nas práticas educativas de docentes da Educação Básica na relação com as diferenças culturais que atravessam o cotidiano da escola. Trata-se de um recorte do estudo que buscou compreender como docentes do Ensino Fundamental significam as diferenças culturais em suas práticas educativas. É uma pesquisa qualitativa, de abordagem (auto)biográfica, em diálogo com os Estudos Culturais em educação, que utilizou diários das práticas educativas, entrevistas narrativas e ateliê biográfico para colheita de informações. O estudo desvelou a experiência com as diferenças na escola articulada com mudanças culturais tecidas por embates, conflitos, afirmação, negação e negociações. Os resultados apontaram para diferentes lugares fronteiriços na relação entre Educação e diferenças, em que deslizamento e negociação de sentidos são fundantes no processo formativo de professores/as e estudantes. No que se refere à prática educativa, os/as docentes narram suas experiências situando-as entre a fronteira rígida, com limitações, isenção do conflito, negação ou conformação das diferenças; e a

fronteira deslizante, com a construção de espaços para que as diferenças sejam acionadas, confrontadas e problematizadas.

Palavras-chave: Práticas Educativas, Diferenças, Narrativas, Ensino Fundamental.

Resumen: El texto aborda las políticas de sentido construidas con respecto a las fronteras y la negociación cultural producidas en las prácticas educativas de profesores de la Educación Básica en relación con las diferencias culturales que traspasan la vida cotidiana de la escuela. Se trata de un extracto del estudio que buscó entender como profesores de la Enseñanza Fundamental significan las diferencias culturales en sus prácticas educativas. Es una investigación cualitativa con un abordaje (auto)biográfico, en diálogo con los Estudios Culturales em educación, que utilizó diarios de práctica educativa, entrevistas narrativas y el taller biográfico para obtener informaciones. El estudio reveló la experiencia con las diferencias en la escuela en articulación con cambios culturales tejidos por enfrentamientos, conflictos, afirmación, negación y negociaciones. Los resultados sugieren diferentes lugares fronterizos en la relación entre Educación y diferencias, en que el movimiento y la negociación de los sentidos son esenciales en el proceso formativo de profesores/as y estudiantes. Con respecto a la práctica educativa, los/as profesores/as narran sus experiencias colocándolas entre la frontera rígida, con limitaciones, libre de conflicto, negación, o conformación con las diferencias; y la frontera en movimiento, con la construcción de espacios para que las diferencias sean accionadas, confrontadas y problematizadas.

Palabras clave: Prácticas Educativas, Diferencias, Narrativas, Enseñanza Fundamental.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary school is an increasingly heterogeneous time/space, with multiple identities and intense production of exchanges, knowledges, experiences, and hybrid cultures. So, how to think about the school without reflecting on the differences that constitute it? What are the meanings produced by teachers regarding pedagogical experiences in the relation with cultural differences?

Differences trespass us, question us, provoke us, and displace meanings as we continuously deal with them, circulating through society, in the alterity, permeating our daily life and educational spaces, and, in the current moment, which is referred by Bauman (2005) as uncertain and transitory, identities and differences can no longer be understood as fixed and solid elements.

In view of this assumption and of the understanding of culture as a "space of enunciation" (Bhabha, 2003), the text approaches the meanings of "boundary" and "cultural negotiation" articulated with narratives by Basic Education teachers about their educational practices in the relation with the cultural differences that trespass the everyday school life. The tensioning of *negotiations* and *boundaries* allows considering the transformations of social dynamics influenced by the globalization phenomenon and postmodern thought, which directly affect the individuals whose social identities are flowing, fragmented.

Cultural differences are actively produced as well as the meanings that we attribute to them are always under negotiation, tensioned, and displaced. Consequently, the school environment can be seen as a territory of encounter, construction, and negotiation. The educational practices constitute a symbolic and political construct permeated by conflicts, contradictions, representations, and historical-social-cultural

relations with multiple, individual, and collective interests and meanings. It is in this complex and multifaced scenario that involves cultural differences and educational practices that this study is inspired by the Cultural Studies, especially through the negotiation concept proposed by Bhabha (2003), in articulation with the perspective of Critical Intercultural Education based on the contributions of Candau (2008; 2011; 2013) and Fleuri (2006).

Negotiation acquires specificity in this study since, when transposed to the cultural perception, understood as an activity of symbolic signification, it moves away from the understanding of difference as an essence or fixed. The Intercultural approach helps reflect educational perspectives and practices, understood as a symbolic field forged in the social, cultural, and relational contexts. Based on this theoretic approach, we aimed to give up on rigid and mutually excluding distinctions, understanding cultural differences – ethnic/racial, sexual and gender, religious, and socioeconomic– in an articulated way.

Furthermore, educational practices in the scope of cultural differences in the school context, investigated and interpreted here, are expressed as the result of provisional processes in articulation with different elements of reality (linguistic, social, economic, subjective, racial, of sexuality and gender), distinct positionings, places, and roles that the individuals engage in. Teachers are inserted in the production of meanings trespassed by distinct experiences in the scope of educational training and the profession itself, in which different contexts, identities, and positionings are involved. It is then necessary to know how the teachers negotiate with cultural differences and their meanings in their educational practices in the school context.

This text is the result of studies performed by the Teaching, Narratives, and Diversity in Basic Education Research Group – DIVERSO, in the matrix research Teaching Profession in the Basic Education of Bahia [1] , at the State University of Bahia (UNEB). Specifically, it is part of a qualitative research based on the assumptions of the (auto)biographical approach, with emphasis on teacher narratives, through which we aimed to understand how Elementary Education teachers signify cultural differences in the context of their educational practices.

Based on these perspectives, this text was organized in two moments. The first presents and investigates the process of production of cultural differences based on the pedagogical boundaries constructed by the networks of meanings brought up by the teachers in their narratives. The second moment addresses the zones of negotiation that are constructed in the educational practices of the teachers when working with cultural differences in the classroom.

METHODOLOGY

This text is the result of a qualitative research based on the assumptions of the (auto)biographical approach, with emphasis on teacher narratives, using narrative interviews as information collection instruments, along

with educational practice journals and the biographical workshop inspired by Delory-Momberger (2006), involving six teachers of the Municipal Education Network of the metropolitan region of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil.

The choice of the (auto)biographical approach results from the possibility of dialogue between the individual subject, who narrates his/her life, and the sociocultural individual that speaks of an experienced reality. The individual is summoned to understand him/herself, through the narrative, as the actor/actress-protagonist of his/her own history. According to Passeggi (2010, p. 116), it is through the appropriation of the semiotic instrument (writing) that "the me (auto) takes conscience of the self and re-signifies life (bio) in order to be born again"; in this perspective, involved in a regressive and progressive process, "the subject speaks of 'him/herself' as a 'reflected me,' reinvented by the action of language." The procedural character of the (auto)biographical activity refers to the symbolic, behavioral, and verbal operations through which, by means of the enunciative movement, the subjects write in their experiences and actions, mobilizing temporal arrangements and guided by memory, which is transformed into texts. Therefore, it ends up valuing life, culture, knowledge, and the meanings produced by the individuals themselves, revealing singularities, subjectivities, contexts, and social practices.

The methodological devices used were relevant and complementary in this study as they allowed access to the narratives, both individually and in the collective of teachers, particularly the meanings attributed to their educational practices in the relation with the cultural differences that trespass the everyday school life. For that purpose, narrative interviews, educational practice journals, and the biographical workshop inspired by Delory-Momberger (2006) were used as information collection tools involving six teachers of the Municipal Education Network of the metropolitan region of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil.

The biographical workshop, entitled *A look on the self and the "others,"* was inspired by the biographical workshop developed by Delory-Moberger (2008, p. 356), allowing the involvement of the individual in a "procedure that writes in life history through a prospective dynamic that connects the past, present, and future of the individuals and aims to emerge their personal project," whose central idea is the construction of a temporal and spatial scenario for the understanding of experiential learnings. It is designed as an opportune space/time for sharing experiences, and, through the socialization, self-writing, and understanding of the other, there was a perspective that the narratives would bring up experiences, feelings, positionings, and negotiation movements that occur in the interstices of cultural differences and teaching practices. Based on the workshop, it was possible to produce the educational practice journals of the Basic Education teachers and subsequently the narrative interviews based on three trigger themes, namely: a) recognizing our cultural identities; b) pedagogical practices

and cultural differences in the school context; and our c) representations of the "others."

We availed ourselves of teacher narratives to access and interpret the meanings attributed by these individuals to the cultural differences in their educational practices and how they act and stand in such contexts. Meaning is understood here as something disputed and actively produced. That is, we cannot think about the production of cultural differences without considering them in a relational process, as a discursive social production. Language shows to be a privileged place of institution of the individuals, their positioning and meanings.

In this scenario, a teacher is a person that is constituted and defined in the interaction, based on how he/she signifies him/herself and the other, influencing the constitution and definition of this other with whom he/she interacts by the dynamic of the educational practices. In turn, in this educational movement, the negotiations regarding what is or what is not imply meanings and positionings based on the place in which each individual is called to look and to narrate him/herself. Only then, through narratives, in this study, is it possible to put into action the social actors in their relations with cultural differences and the educational practices in the school context.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN THE CLASSROOM: DISCURSIVE BOUNDARIES IN DISPUTE

Cultural differences are constituted as "a process of signification through which the affirmations *of* culture and/or *about* culture differentiate, discriminate, and authorize the production of force, reference, applicability, and ability fields" (Bhabha, 2003, p. 63). The observation of how this process reflects on the work of the teacher in the classroom is important as it is associated with the relations, positionings, and the normality or abnormality of social life and representational policies. As a symbolic terrain, it expresses cultures and meanings attributed by the individuals in the alterity. Thus, the problematization of cultural differences in the context of the educational practice of the teacher can reveal boundary conflicts in which meanings are triggered, the manner how they are produced, reproduced, excluded, included, neutralized, or naturalized, or even recognized, valued, understood, tolerated, and respected.

For the Cultural Studies, as a cultural practice, the educational practice implies negotiations as culture is a construction of meanings. Based on these assumptions, we analyzed the places of discursive boundaries in which the possible meanings about cultural differences are produced and negotiated in the narratives of the teachers regarding their educational practices. Based on these assumptions, we used three approaches presented by Candau (2011) regarding differences in the relationship with Education - essentialist, differential, and intercultural – to think about the construction of discursive boundaries produced based on the practices developed by the teachers.

In a movement of searching for the meanings attributed to the cultural differences present in the school context we perceive traces of an assimilationist conception as the idea of a common, homogenous culture is affirmed; in its name, the identity references and cultural practices of the students are ignored. In this perspective, "all" are called to participate in the school system, maintaining a monocultural and homogenizer character, through which difference becomes similarity. In the educational practice report made by the teacher Néa, [2] we can observe some elements that may assist us in thinking about these issues:

> *Then, when the boy is too gaudy to the point of disturbing my class, I call him out, but, besides that, I carry on because, for me, he is just like any other person; if the boy is effeminate, or if the girl has a more male side, it does not interfere with my class. The interference is only when he feels free to show up and then begins to disturb my class, then I do interfere. Sometimes I call him privately aside, talk to him, and tell him that he is disturbing the class, that he does not need to show up this way, that the student who studies stands out much more from the others than those who disturb the class by wanting attention. This student stands out positively because the others will see him as the smart one, the one who knows things. Then I call him out, but always in private.* (Nea, narrative fragment, Entrevista, 2017).

In the narrative of teacher Néa, we observe that the different is something that disturbs and destabilizes her; the different is *gaudy*, *but besides that*, while the different is *quiet* and does not disturb, he is seen as equal to *any other person*. In this perspective, the discourse suggests that, while it perceives difference, it does not recognize it as it begins to treat it as equal. The difference is neutralized and placed in the field of normalization.

Normalization, according to Silva (2013), is a subtle process of manifestation of power. The purpose of normalization appears in the narrative of teacher Néa through the expression besides that, being possible to infer when the student, instead of disturbing her class with acts that are considered gaudy, behaves in the manner expected by the teacher, according to an instituted standard. Then she proceeds with her class, or, by her own words, *I carry on*. The difference is then reaped as, according to her narrative, *for me, he is just like any other person [...]*. In this perspective, normalization has a homogenizing force; there is an attempt to homogenize based on a reference.

Defining what is normal is a way of producing difference. In order to define and constitute an identity as normal or natural, it was necessary to count on the definition and constitution of the different, abnormal, antinatural, or undesirable, the strange, that is, *the gaudy*. The identities, in this case, were constructed through an essentialist and binary marking of difference. The boundary established by the cultural differences is rigid, that is, ruled by the normalization of the individual. The difference is perceived as a norm.

From the natural point of view, essentialism is related to the biological root, centered on the idea of fixity. The identitarian, under a historical root approach, is based on tradition, appealing to the "reality" of an obscured and repressed past in which identity, proclaimed in the present,

is "revealed" (Woodward, 2013). When addressing the student as *gaudy*, the reference of teacher Néa lies on the student who studies. She thus exposes a hegemonic school discourse based on an essentialist approach with a historical root that assumes the principle of school democratization. However, in order to be accepted and included, the difference needs to be normalized. This perspective is based on the monocultural epistemology approach of European and Western modernity by the universalization of the illuminist heritage.

The educational practice, supported on the oneness of the point of view of universal knowledge, works as a device of cultural imposition, since, in truth, it means the universalization of culture and the experience of the "cultural authority" (Bhabha, 2003) of the dominant group and its establishment as a rule. Therefore, it means oneness in the perspective of absorbing what is better produced; it is even universal as it refers to humanity without admitting anything external, that is, nothing outside the Eurocentric standards. In this perspective, the cultural differences are excluded when adherence to legitimized cultural standards is imposed to establish the norm.

In the same narrative, the meaning of interfering suggests the adequation of difference to the norm and, consequently, a way to socially exclude it when expressing: *that he does not need to show up this way, but positively*. The emphasis on the educational practice through an assimilationist perspective aims at integrating the subject in society so that he/she may be incorporated into the hegemonic culture. With that, such a practice delegitimizes the values, beliefs, and knowledges of the different groups, excluding the differences, either explicit or implicitly, when aiming to integrate them by valuing only certain privileged knowledges.

Another way to perceive differences, as discussed by Candau (2011), is the differential approach. Conceiving difference in this perspective is to think about it as something unique, putting emphasis on recognizing differences and based on the assertion that, when emphasizing assimilation, the difference is denied, silenced, or downplayed. We find this differential perspective in the narrative of teacher Néa when she refers to the identity of the student. The meaning of difference is in the category of the fault: the individual lacks an appropriate behavior in view of the "cultural other" (Bhabha, 2003) – his colleagues and the teacher; he lacks intelligence for an alleged adequation to the school environment. Access to knowledge is put as an assumption of cultural difference; the school is a time/place only meant to learn contents.

Therefore, when identifying her students, teacher Néa establishes rigid, fixed boundaries between those who fit and those who do not fit her representation of a student. Thus, the positions of these individuals are marked by the polarizing power of inclusion and exclusion by privileging some over others and producing difference through the classificatory process. Classificatory thought works by dividing and organizing the cultural relationships, still aiming at homogeneity, which, in this case, takes form and strength in the school discourse. Under this perspective, the educational practice with a differential approach resembles the

assimilationist approach when suggesting the maintenance of isolated groups separated in specific communities.

Some aspects of the differential perspective can also be perceived in the following narrative excerpt of teacher Anna Sophia:

> *As a matter of fact, if we also consider the cultural issue, for the exclusive student, we can also perceive the suburban aspect, in which they put themselves as "I'm from the suburbs, from the favela", in contradiction to issues such as "I'm from the beachfront"; then we can perceive that they put themselves as "favela" in order to acquire cultural goods related to that environment. The language expressed from this idea of..., including criminal faction terminologies, we perceive that they manifest it through songs, they listen to slang songs, with inappropriate words, and they also express themselves in this way, cursing one another. This also occurs in their relationships with one another, affective relationships, the way how they treat each other, with addressing pronouns that became cursing.* (Anna Sophia, narrative fragment, Entrevista, 2017)

Teacher Anna Sophia addresses the suburban aspect by delimiting identity production through the binary bias: *I'm from the suburbs, I'm from the favela, in contradiction to I'm from the beachside*. In this binarism, the teacher exposes the voice of the students, seeming to determine a political and cultural positioning of these individuals in relation to the group that they belong to. When, in the enunciation, the individual says: *I'm from the suburbs*, it suggests the delimitation of an identity territory, thus inferring a sense of appropriation of cultural goods that will probably give the individual the possibility of sharing the cultural practices of such a context. In turn, the expression "I'm from the beachside" constitutes a geographically placed social marker in the relation between the belonging spaces of the students. In this interstice, the dispute for identity discursive positionings is processed towards the identification with cultural difference.

On the other hand, through a differential perspective, there is a differentiation between high and low culture through which binarism is established. This movement of production of meaning infers the possibility of a game of desire and pleasure by students with their *low culture*, in an exercise of "cultural regulation" (Hall, 2011), although the narrative of the teacher suggests the meaning of suburban culture as slang.

The narrative of teacher Anna Sophia also implies a position that has been historically constructed and disseminated by the school, through which a hegemonical culture is still valued, that is, the cultural repertoires of the privileged socioeconomic classes. The suburb or favela is represented, in the referred narrative, as a space of violence and the producer of an inferior language, *slang*. This narrative fragment of the teacher demands the questioning of identity and difference as power relations, that is, according to Silva (2013), problematizing the binarism around which they organize and that lead to their classification.

It is worth mentioning that the production of identity and the delimitation of difference, in the essentialist and differential approaches, imply power operations, defining and classifying identities through processes by which the indication of occupied roles occurs, as seen in the discourse of teacher Néa. This involves polarized positionings,

the binarism around which identity and difference are articulated and organized.

Polarizations can, for example, include/exclude – these belong, these do not; delimit fixed boundaries – we and they; classify - good and evil ones, pure and impure, developed and primitive, rational and irrationals; and normalize – we are normal, they are abnormal (Silva, 2013). Dichotomies express the meanings, identity positionings, and differences in the fight for the legitimacy of cultures in the context in which they are inserted. The traces of essentialism emerge as the history and power relations that produce the differences are disregarded, by which these tend to be seen as naturalized and essentialized.

Still in the case of the narrative of teacher Anna Sophia, the dichotomy situated in the field of classification, particularly, confers legitimacy to the culture considered high (*from the beachside*) to the detriment of a low culture (*from the suburbs*). The other – the low culture – has a poor vocabulary, being also incompetent and responsible for its own social condition, so that its cultural poverty turns its words into *slang* and *inappropriate* to coexist with the differences in the school context. The difference emerges in the perspective of inferiorization.

We can note that polarization always employs a reducing and basilar behavior to legitimize excluding processes. It can support stereotypes, discriminations, and prejudices, as evidenced in the narrative of teacher Anna Sophia. However, Fleuri (2006) affirms that the relations through this bias can be questioned and even overcome as long as the different individuals recognize themselves based on their contexts, histories, and enunciative positions. It is precisely this notion of cultural dichotomization (low/high) that can be deconstructed, being then understood, according to Bhabha (2003), as a field of power, contestation, and fight as well as of negotiation.

EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES: BETWEEN NEGOCIATIONS AND AMBIVALENCES

In contemporaneity, the historical and educational processes that have supported the fixation of identities are in collapse as new identities have been forged, often through fighting and political contestation by new socio-cultural groups, among them *suburban* groups based on the fight for the legitimacy and affirmation of cultural differences. This does not highlight opposition between identities and differences but instead validates the interdependency process between them, which are socially interwoven to power relations. In this game of forces, it is worth saying that there is always a vigorous and biased movement towards the fixation and crystallization of cultural identity. However, opposing this view, the cultural identities are always under negotiation since they are hybrid and fluid, as understood in this study.

When addressing the differences and identities in the interior of the school, while meaning policies, we are not referring to idyllic relationships but rather to impositions that imply disputes. As a

consequence, the production of difference and cultural identity as a linguistic, social, and cultural construct, agreeing with Silva (2013), implies an articulation between intentionality and meaning, revealing power relations/force vectors, that is, the power to define, (de)limit, and (re)produce differences.

Therefore, in order to think about cultural differences, it is pertinent to consider a wide range of conflicts and tensions that permeate the school context, as suggested by the narrative of teacher Nino, when addressing the production of differences and identities in the interior of the school:

> *[...] we guys try to address this thing of different behavior as equal, which, besides, one cannot expect to handle a classroom with 30 and 40 people and have a similarity of behavior and attitude [...], but it is really in the language that the kid uses in the classroom, through an essay in which you ask him to write down his experience that you find out, for example, that the father of that boy or that girl was murdered, in theme of violence [...].* (Nino, narrative fragment, Entrevista, 2017)

At first, when addressing the identification of differences in the dynamic of the classroom, the narrative of teacher Nino evidences remnants of a universalist and equalitarian education, aimed at legitimizing the monocultural character of school education as a symbolic meaning of that which perpetuates in the collective imagination of teachers, when he says: *we try to address this thing of different behavior as equal*.

The term *we guys* used by teacher Nino is semantically equivalent to us - teachers. With that, we can infer that he includes himself in this monocultural perspective. On the other hand, although referring to the behavioral vision of differences: *a similarity of behavior and attitude*, teacher Nino recognizes that it is not possible to disregard the presence of differences in the school environment. Furthermore, when using language as a pedagogical resource for educational activities, it seems to us that the teacher perceives elements from the cultural contexts in which his students are inserted.

However, as warned by Candau (2008), if the purpose is to turn the different ones into equals, the educational institution imposes a kind of "cultural Daltonism" [3] to the dynamic of its educational practices when, in everyday school life, it disregards the "rainbow" of cultures that constitutes the heterogeneity of the individuals in the classroom. For the author (2008), the presence of the "rainbow of cultures" in educational practices somehow allows us to create new ways to situate ourselves and intervene in everyday school life.

When narrating the production of identities and differences in the school, teacher Nino seems to make a reflection, and, in this movement, he recognizes himself in view of the differences at the same time as he places himself as a teacher in the context of diversity. This way of looking at differences and recognizing them in their heterogeneity suggests a closer approach with the third way of conceiving differences in the school context, called by Candau (2008) of intercultural perspective.

Contrary to the essentialist and differential perspectives, it is a basic thing, in the educational intercultural perspective, the understanding of

the cultural differences as constructs under continuous elaboration and (re)construction, that is, not fixed and immutable, but rather dynamic, historical, and tense, imbricated in power relations. The purpose of the intercultural perspective is to promote, in the school context, the interrelation between different sociocultural groups by problematizing the way how differences are constructed and questioning universalist and homogenizing visions of the cultures.

The narrative of teacher Nino allows us to visualize other positionings in relation to cultural differences:

> *This is the gender separation that we make. I'm discussing gender with the 8th grade kids, discussing status and social role, and one of the topics this unit is the issue of gender, these separations. [...] male chauvinism is different from violence, a man that beats a woman; that is not male chauvinism, but violence, you can say that there is an exacerbation of male chauvinism, but that's violence, not male chauvinism, male chauvinism is for you to say that, at home, my duty is to tighten the screws, I'm the one who does that, and who cooks is the woman [...]. Thus, that's male chauvinism, and it does not come only from the man, but from the woman also. "Only the man does it". That's the type of instilled mentality that we have had throughout time. I tell the kids, in this discussion, that this current generation needs to be better than our generation, because there are still some things that we could not overcome, and much was conquered, but there is still much to be done. I always say: "Your generation has to be better than ours, it needs to overcome certain things that we did not manage to overcome", but that means that I, because of that, know that I have to use this language with the kids, I must give them the freedom to think, and so on [...].* (Nino, narrative fragment, Practive Diary, 2017)

In this narrative fragment, teacher Nino evidences hints that seem to us to be closer to the intercultural perspective, not because he discusses with his students a number of issues regarding gender difference but rather because he suggests the need of deconstructing stereotypes and of naturalization. The fact of proposing a discussion in the classroom regarding male chauvinism, emphasizing social roles that involve gender relations, and providing openings so that the male and female students may position themselves regarding the theme sounds like a possibility to change the meaning policies that permeate the gender difference relations culturally expressed in the idea of female subordination.

Naturalization, as we have already discussed, is one of the devices used to make differences invisible, as well as stereotyping, with both being characteristics placed in the field of the essentialist and differential perspectives. On the other hand, perceiving others in their alterity, not only as a source of conflict but rather as the effect of subordination or authority, allows changing values and the rules of their recognition.When proposing gender discussion with the students, focusing on the status and the social role of females, this practice of teacher Nino reveals a possibility of thinking that the differences are formed in the movement of history and culture, centrally constituting a matter of power; therefore, the meanings attributed to the differences are not given as natural. In this symbolic field, meanings are not fixed, homogeneous, and unitarian but rather move through a space of tension and cultural confrontation, constituting a zone of ambivalence. Therefore, as stated by Bhabha

(2003), culture is established as a "space of enunciation," and cultural difference is constituted.

Furthermore, it is possible to infer a possibility to deconstruct historically constructed and propagated discourses. In view of that, based on the considerations by Candau (2011), we suppose that the educational practice of teacher Nino tends to the recognition and valuing of cultural differences in the context of the always dynamic marks of the identities while fighting tendencies and stereotypes, which try to turn them into inequalities as well as making the individuals referred to them as the objects of prejudice and discrimination.

When considered through an intercultural perspective, still in this narrative of teacher Nino, dealing with social themes in the classroom and allowing their problematization results in "the recognition of the right to diversity and the fight against all forms of discrimination and social inequality that attempt to promote dialogical and equalitarian relations between peoples and groups that belong to different cultural universes" (Candau, 2013, p. 56). The differences are the result of multiple processes, and, as a consequence, the impossibility of fixation, essentialization, and crystallization of identities is expressed.

Besides, the production of cultural differences occurs in the meanings of inter-relational movements whose focus is on the result of the differentiation process that results from power relations. The narrative of teacher Nino suggests the understanding of differences as historical and social constructs, consequently supposing a distancing from the homogenizing educational practice and, thus, from the assimilationist and differential perspectives.

With these intercultural assumptions, it is possible to infer that, from the educational practice of teacher Nino, there may emerge a paradigm that works through the interpretation of the self and of the other, resulting from mutual interpretation, a space in which every voice is perceived and recognized in its alterity. We can infer this moment when the teacher speaks of *giving them the freedom to think*. Dialogues, tensions, and conflicts are supposed to occur in the space/time of the school during the discussions, although it is not explicit in this narrative fragment. Nevertheless, teacher Nino only narrates that this activity led to individual and collective works throughout the unit, allowing to observe, at this moment, according to Candau (2011), that the dialogue has its place in educational practice in order to destitute visions that aim at normalizing or polarizing individuals.

Another aspect of the intercultural perspective that is supposedly present in the narrative of teacher Nino is considering history as an important factor in order to understand that the individuals are in progress and never finished. This is clear when the teacher affirms that the *current generation* needs to overcome issues that his generation has not yet overcome. The production of identities and differences is then seen as a fluid movement in an intense and dynamic flow, both cultural and historical. This discussion leads us to consider cultural identities in the contemporary context, in agreement with Bauman (2005), as a

"mobile celebration," that is, no longer fixed, unified – as they were for the illuminist individual, who was self-centered – but rater constituted of multiple forms, amidst discourses, practices, and positions, being often intercrossed and antagonistic. They are formed and modified in the inter-relation of representations of the sociocultural systems. The inter is configured as the conducting wire of negotiation as it brings with it the meaning of power and culture and the possibilities of displacements and erasures.

However, when privileging the transformations of social, cultural, and institutional relations in which the meanings are generated, the educational practice cannot be seen as a punctual action in the perspective of interculturality. According to Candau (2011), in such a perspective, the educational practice, as a cultural practice, is constituted as an integrative process in the everyday dynamic of the school, in different political, pedagogical, and curricular dimensions, in a systemic manner, for purposes beyond the school walls, displacing boundaries. In view of that, we understand that the educational practice of teacher Nino is placed in the "inter-space", that is, in movement between the differential and intercultural perspectives.

The intercultural perspective defended by Candau (2008), [4] upon which we support the reflections of this study, is based on a "transformation policy," since without it, among other forms of accommodation, there is a risk of reduction to the current social order. Such an approach proposes the promotion of an education directed towards the recognition of the other, the dialogue between different social and cultural groups, and cultural negotiation, which faces conflicts caused by the asymmetry of power that exists in society, among the different sociocultural groups, so that it may favor the construction of a common project, with the dialogue between equality and identity policies, and considering "cultural hybridization" (Bhabha, 2003) as an important element that, according to Candau (2008), takes into account the dynamic of the different sociocultural groups.

For Candau (2008), the intercultural approach can refer to specific situations displaced from the dynamic and everyday school life and cannot be restricted to exclusively approach the theme of specific groups. Thus, it is about giving a systemic focus that involves all characters and scopes of the educational practices. Regarding the school, it "affects curriculum selection, school organization, languages, educational practices, extra-class activities, the role of the teacher, and the relation with the community, among other things" (Candau, 2008, p. 53). In this perspective, the school space and time can be perceived as an emancipatory political dimension if the school is, in fact, produced for all as an educational *locus*, even if the cultural differences are considered as stimulation and enrichment.

In education, the intercultural perspective is not about promoting a simple inter-relation between different cultures but rather about developing a process of construction of "other" knowledges, "other" political practices, "other" power, social, and cultural positionings,

constituting another form of thought meanings in opposition to modernity or "coloniality." This means to have "a different engagement in the policy of and around cultural domination" (Bhabha, 2003, p. 60). In this scenario, this perspective opens a space for our discussion regarding the negotiation and ambivalence of cultural differences in the school context, exposed in the next narrative fragment.

The school is shown as a political arena of intervention and production of new subjectivities. "The cultural differences– ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, religious, among others – are manifested in all their colors, sounds, rites, knowledges, beliefs, and other forms of expression" (Candau, 2011, p. 241). The dynamic and fluidity regarding how cultural differences appear and provoke meaning in the school expose the need for another semantic field and a new understanding of what we name as individuals and problematize teaching activities related to differences that insist on having a homogenizing principle.

Contrary to homogenization is the negotiation of the social and cultural value (Bhabha, 2003) of identities and differences. The articulation between cultural difference and negotiation allows us to think that identity construction creates hybrid fighting spaces in which fixed identities are not justified or can be tensioned and destabilized. The production of identities and differences puts into play elements and meanings that are often ambivalent and fluid and power relations. Power can express, among other meanings, prejudice and discrimination, as narrated by teacher Anna Sophia:

> *[...] regarding ethnic-racial issues, schooling, etc., the only light-haired girl (blonde) in the classroom posted on her social media (Facebook) that, unfortunately, she was leaving home to that classroom full of ugly and poor people. This resulted in extreme controversy in the classroom [...]. The students were enraged, specially the girls, and even threatened to spank her [...] due to the devaluation of their identities. In this context, they said: "we don't have class, we are from the favela, we are poor, but we are clean, I came because of the lunch", well [...]. She affected that class in such a way that they received her discourse in revolt [...]. With this situation, I ended up working the theme of tolerance/intolerance. In the second unit, it was precisely the theme of the evaluation essay; in the third unit, we went on discussing about how kindness generates kindness, aiming at raising awareness on how to live better, respecting others in all their diversity* (Anna Sophia, narrative fragment, Practive Diary, 2017).

In this narrative fragment of teacher Anna Sophia, the ethnic difference is revealed to be woven by clashes, conflicts, affirmations, and negotiations, reverberating tensions present in the game of meanings of the positionings of cultural differences. The cultural other, expressed by the black girls, reflects aesthetical and socioeconomic values and contests the positioning as it revolts and reacts to the occurred fact by trying to legitimize the occupation of a rightful role in a counter-hegemonic strategy. The identity expressed by the white figure is disturbed by the other – the different, without whom the existence of the first would make no sense, but we cannot disregard the attempt to reduce cultures, by then seen as subordinates, as a strategy that aims at maintaining this power in the process of production of identities and cultural differences.

The tension between repetition (white attitude) and performativity (black attitude) establishes a "zone of ambivalence of differences" expressed in the movement of discursive positionings through the established relations, depending on the game of interests of power. Agreeing with Bhabha (2003), this is a limit space/time of possibilities for culture to be established as a "space of enunciation." The problem of cultural interaction emerges in signifying boundaries – in the interstices of cultural differences. This is the zone of negotiation, where each position is always a political space/time of fight and production of meanings, exposing representation and values, clashes, contestation, and affirmation. It is the place for the enunciation of cultural differences.

Therefore, the narrative of teacher Anna Sophia exposes boundaries established between symbolic and social representations of the black and white ethnicities in everyday school life in the production of identities and cultural differences. The boundary sometimes appears as a way to differentiate, with the purpose to subordinate "the cultural other" (Bhabha, 2003), as in the discourse of the white girl, and sometimes it emerges as a displaced boundary, with the purpose of resistance, as in the discourse of the black girls. The negotiation of the cultural authority is put into play as the referential truth of the essentialist perspective. The cultural other that emerges (black students) is no longer the negative of the legitimized culture, although it sums to the cultures seen today in the complex contemporaneous societies. Thus, corroborating with Bhabha (2003), identities and differences are always negotiated.

In this context, negotiation opens a field for the tensioning, problematization, and displacement of boundaries in which cultural differences are produced and placed in the school context. It is then important to pay attention to how educational practices are performed in the scope of cultural differences and the meanings attributed to them by teachers in contemporaneity.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS

This study highlights some perspectives regarding cultural differences and their meanings in the educational practices developed in Basic Education. These meanings were understood based on an essentialist perspective that situates differences in the fields of neutralization and normalization, establishing rigid boundaries in the policy of meanings constructed based on education practices; based on a differential perspective that inserts differences in scope of classification, placing differences in the field of silencing and denial; and, finally, based on an intercultural perspective, by tensioning the differences based on the political, historical, and cultural fields of the production of the individuals, their life histories, and belongings.

The results of the research pointed to different border places in the relationship between Education and differences, in which slip and negotiation of meanings are founders in the training process

of teachers/as and students. Regarding the educational practice, the teachers narrate their experiences by placing them between the rigid boundary, with limitations, free from conflicts, denial, or resignation with differences; and the moving boundary, with the construction of spaces so that differences can be triggered, challenged, and problematized. The experience with cultural differences in the interior of the school is articulated to a movement of social and cultural changes in which students and teachers are inserted, constituting a web of meanings woven by clashes and conflicts, affirmation and denial, and negotiations. It is in this context that the educational practices in Basic Education are challenged by the differences in the everyday life of the classrooms.

In this context, the narratives of the teachers revealed that the educational practice was constructed as *discursive boundaries* established in the relation with cultural diversity. We could observe that the practices oscillate between rigid and moving boundaries regarding meaning policies about cultural differences, placing them in different manners, such as: i) a position of acceptance, free from confrontation and conflict; ii) when promoting the naturalization, inferiorization, and silencing of differences; iii) reinforcing the monocultural character of the educational practices; iv) allowing the clash and confrontation of representations, the deconstruction and overcoming of prejudices and discrimination attitude among individuals; v) considering the inter-relational aspect implied in the production of differences and identities; vi) providing dialogues and positionings in view of the other.

As we saw in the teacher narratives, the experience with cultural differences in the interior of the school is articulated with this movement of social and cultural changes in which students and teachers are inserted, constituting a web of meanings woven by clashes and conflicts, affirmation and denial, and negotiations.

The discursive boundaries regarding cultural differences can constitute both consensus and dissent; they can realign the usual boundaries between tradition and cultural negotiation and challenge naturalization expectations. It is in this context that the educational practices in Basic Education are challenged by the differences in the everyday life of the classrooms.

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Notes

1 Research funded by the MCTI/CNPq Universal Call nº 28/2018, approved by the UNEB Ethics Committee, through the nº 1.231.920.

2 The names of the teachers are fictional in observance of the regulations of the Research Ethics Committee, according to the Free Consent Form (TCLE) presented to the teachers involved in the study. Furthermore, throughout the text, their speeches are highlighted in italics.

3 Candau (2008; 2011) uses the expression "cultural Daltonismo", borrowed from the authors Stephen Stoer & Luiza Cortesão (1999, p. 56).

4 The intercultural perspective adopted by Candau (2011) approaches the resistance and critical multiculturalism by McLaren (1993; 2000); however, the concept of interculturalism is supported on the elaborations by Catherine Walsh (2009), based on das decolonial theories.

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