


PAULO FREIRE IN UNIVERSITY EXTENSION: FORMATIVE CIRCLES WITH BEGINNER/NEW TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

The extension project Formative Circles with Beginner/Incoming Teachers has been under development since the beginning of 2018 and aims to strengthen the teaching career through the reorientation of work and self-assessment and, thus, subsidize public policies to support teachers. It is necessary to highlight the conception of extension defended by the extension workers: the organic-procedural extension (REIS, 1996), that is, an action of a permanent, dialogical nature and exchange of formative experiences. The methodological proposal of the project in question is the promotion of Formative Circles, which are based on Paulo Freire's Culture Circles, horizontal, dialogical and liberating formative spaces. Thus, the objective of this work is to discuss Freire's conceptions of Culture Circles and generating themes and to draw a parallel between these definitions and the experiences lived in the Extension Project throughout the first half of 2021, especially with regard to the approximations to the Culture Circles and the choice of themes to be developed. Finally, it is emphasized that the Project, as a historically positioned reality, is always in the process of (re)construction and, in this way, the study and reflection about it is a way to unveil challenges and possibilities, as well as to reaffirm the inseparability between teaching, research and extension.

Keywords: Crop Circles. Paulo Freire. University Extension. Formative Circles with Beginner/Incoming Teachers.

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INTRODUCTION

University extension is a space for dialogue, exchange of formative experiences and collective construction of knowledge, understanding intrinsic to organic-processual extension (REIS, 1996). In this sense, the objective of extension is the formation of the subjects involved, as individuals active in the transformation of their own reality, considering that this is constituted in and from the context in which it is inserted, and that through it it is possible to have a political-pedagogical partnership with society in a bidirectional and mutual way (*idem*). In this way, the action of an organic-processual extension, that is, of a permanent nature, related to research and teaching, "prisms through the training of those involved (as academics), while transforming the real with the activities developed and not only meeting social and market demands" (KOCHHANN et al, 2018, p. 65).

The extension project "Formative Circles with Beginner/Freshman Teachers" was born from the concerns of students and teachers after the completion of a research linked to the Study and Research Group on the Training and Performance of Teachers/Pedagogues (GEPFAPE) of the University of Brasília. The research highlighted characteristics of the period at the beginning of the career, marked as an important formative moment for the consolidation of teaching, in which the teacher is confronted with challenges that provide discoveries and that have an important participation "in the process of learning to be a teacher" (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 85). In this way, "to be a beginner teacher is to be in constant training and to acquire learning all the time" (*idem*, p. 87), so that the initial years of professional practice in schools are essential in the construction of the teacher's identity (NÓVOA, 2006 *apud* NASCIMENTO, 2020).

By perceiving the challenges faced by these teachers, the researchers conceived an extension project in which public school professionals could discuss their social reality, deepening their theoretical-methodological foundations in an environment of horizontal exchange between basic education and the University of Brasília, in order to contribute to the transformation of practice and permanence in teaching.

It is considered that the Extension Project in question enables a permanent training that is simultaneously initial – of undergraduate students – and continued – of basic education teachers.

To think about the permanent training of teachers in the proposal presented here – training circles of freshmen/beginner teachers – we took the concept referred to as continuing education in the materialist dialectical perspective and in the principles of ANFOPE and Paulo Freire, which has as its basic

premise the idea of incompleteness and incompleteness, that is, it is not possible to think of teacher training that does not consider the character of a training process in all human dimensions (COSTA et al, 2019, p. 344).

Thus, the proposal of the Project is to position the workspace as an object of investigation in movement and to provide the training of all those involved, regardless of the moment they are in their formative path (idem).

In five semesters of holding the circles, the project has been developed during the period of Pedagogical Coordination at the Class 831 School of Samambaia, which serves students from Early Childhood Education to the 5th year of Elementary School in both shifts. The school was chosen because Samambaia is a Regional Coordination of Teaching of Capacity, that is, it is a regional in which there are more possibilities of finding teachers who have recently joined the Department of Education (FRANÇA, 2019, apud COSTA et al, 2019). Thus, the school has an average of 10 beginning teachers per shift. It should be noted that in the Federal District, the Public Teaching Career servers, as can be seen in Ordinance No. 395 of December 14, 2018, have at least eight hours per week reserved for the fulfillment of pedagogical coordination activities. Thus, pedagogical coordination is a space for paid collective work time and with a workload within the working day (COSTA et al, 2019).

During the training circles, then, teachers discuss their teaching practice, reflect on their experiences and select themes for deepening and study. The understanding of the Formative Circles originates from the Freirean conception of Culture Circles, which encompasses a dialogical formation in which its members relate to each other on an equal footing, without hierarchical differentiations. In the circles, an education that values the movement of action-reflection-action in a dialogical, humane and liberating educational experience is recommended (TONIOLO and HENZ, 2017; FREIRE, 2001).

The objective of this work, therefore, is to discuss the Culture Circles as a methodology of action in university extension, considering the project "Formative Circles with Beginner/Freshman Teachers", the choice of themes to be worked on and the formative possibilities intrinsic to the Circles.

THE CROP CIRCLES

Problem-solving education is based on the historical attribute and historicity of the subjects, has an authentically reflective character and requires a constant unveiling of reality (FREIRE, 2018). From this perspective, authentic, problematizing education "is not

made of A to B or of A on B, but of A *to* B, mediated by the world" (idem, p. 116, emphasis added), that is, the educator's thinking is only authentic in the thinking of the students, in the mediation of social reality.

In this way, the educator is no longer the one who only educates, but the one who, while educating, is educated, in dialogue with the learner who, by being educated, also educates. Thus, both become subjects of the process in which they grow up together and in which the 'arguments of authority' are no longer valid. (idem, pp. 95-96)

This conception of education is essential to understand horizontality in the Culture Circles, since the construction of knowledge is established from the relationship with the other, considering that the social reality permeates this entire process. There is, as mentioned above, no authorities or transfer of knowledge. All production is collective and mediated by the world.

What, then, would the Culture Circle be? They are spaces for the construction of collective knowledge, based on the problematizing dialogue and the horizontal relationship between educator and student, thus valuing the previous knowledge of both, which considers that the subjects involved in the process are historically positioned and that provides an unveiling of reality.

The circle of culture — in the Paulo Freire method — relives life in critical depth. Consciousness emerges from the lived world, objectifies it, problematizes it, understands it as a human project. In a circular dialogue, intersubjectivizing itself more and more, it critically assumes the dynamism of its creative subjectivity. All together, in a circle, and in collaboration, they re-elaborate the world. (FIORI, 1967, p. 24)

In the Culture circle, all the subjects involved are authors and, based on dialogue and reflection, seek their "permanent self-(trans)formation" (TONIOLO and HENZ, 2017, p. 521), which means that the problematization and critical reflection on social reality provides the construction of transformative possibilities. Objectifying the oppressive reality, that is, critically inserting oneself into reality, is already, for Paulo Freire, a form of action.

In this way, the Culture Circles have the objective of

to make dialogue the very guideline of an experience (BRANDÃO, 2010), generating a problematizing action-reflection-action, from which new knowledge emerges and the possibility of self-(trans)formation through the sharing of experiences, reflection on them and the constant search for

THE GENERATING THEMES

After understanding what the Culture Circles consist of, it is necessary to discuss how the content to be worked on is selected. In this sense, social reality is once again highlighted as a mediator of the entire educational process, that is, "authentic education" (FREIRE, 2018, p. 116) is made from the involvement and joint decision of the subjects, mediated by the world. It is in reality, therefore, that the syllabus of education will be sought, since these can only be understood in the subject-world relations.

Paulo Freire (2018) calls these contents "generative themes", as they have the potential to unfold into several other themes. As mentioned above, they exist in the subjects and in the relations they establish with the objective fact. The selection of such themes must, therefore, consider these relationships, and cannot be reduced to a mechanical act. The research that leads to such themes is carried out from concentric circles, starting from the most general to the particular: "it would be indispensable for them to have a totalized view of the context first, and then to separate or isolate the elements or partialities of the context, through whose vision they would return more clearly to the analyzed totality" (*idem*, p. 133). Thus, this investigation goes beyond a search process, it becomes a joint movement of knowledge creation and already enables the insertion of subjects in a critical way of thinking about their reality.

Thus, it is from the unveiling of reality and its objectification, that is, from the critical insertion of the subjects in it, that contradictions and problematizations are sought that will give rise to the generating themes: "What we have to do, in fact, is to propose to the people, through certain basic contradictions, their existential, concrete, present situation, as a problem that, in turn, challenges him and, thus, demands a response, not only at the intellectual level, but at the level of action" (*idem*, p. 120).

Generating themes, therefore, are themes to be problematized that emerge from the horizontal and collective dialogue and, mainly, from the mediating social reality. Based on the principle of horizontality and joint production of knowledge, it does not make sense for the educator, as a dialogical mediator, to decide the themes to be worked on during the circles. It is up to him "to give back organized, systematized and added to the people those elements that they delivered to them in an unstructured way" (FREIRE, 2018, p. 116).

FORMATIVE CIRCLES: PAULO FREIRE IN UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

THE MOVEMENTS THAT OCCUR IN THE FORMATIVE CIRCLES

Since the first semester of 2018, the Formative Circles have been held at the Class School (EC) 831 of Samambaia with the objective of enabling continuous-permanent training, as well as the strengthening of the teaching career, based on the reorientation of work and self-evaluation, and subsidizing public policies to support teachers, providing a safer pedagogical practice, avoiding dropouts, favoring intervention and analysis of difficulties and enabling social transformations. It is important to reiterate the role of university extension as an activity that goes beyond the provision of services, which enables the development of flexible actions that are coherent with social realities and demands (REIS, 1996).

The extension project in question is aimed at beginner/incoming teachers. The differentiation between beginners and freshmen was evidenced in the research that led to the creation of this project (CURADO SILVA, 2018; CURADO SILVA and NUNES, 2016, apud COSTA et al, 2019). Thus, a *beginner* is a professional with no previous teaching experience, and a *freshman* is a professional with previous experience.

In this sense, it seeks to develop, in the Formative Circles, dialogical movements, in which knowledge is not taken from the University to the school, but rather that knowledge is built from the sharing of experiences and resignification of educational experiences and practices.

This time, we call the project of formative circles as a training capable of proposing a critical reflection on practice, on reality, ratifying the university-school dialogue in a perspective of encounters of practices and the construction of collectivity. (COSTA et al, 2019, p. 345)

The development of each Circle can be divided into moments and movements that occur before, during and after each meeting.

Initially, the themes to be worked on are chosen. Those who make this choice are the teachers of basic education, based on the mediation of the group from the University of Brasília, which is consistent with the proposal of organic-procedural extension, since the demands always start from the social reality of the teachers without, however, a welfare logic. Then, in the biweekly meetings of undergraduate students and professors of the University of Brasília, the meetings are planned, based on the previously selected themes. The extension workers are divided into groups, each with its own responsibility, and the

planning, despite being done prior to the development of the Circle, always has the objective of engaging and encouraging the participation of EC 831 teachers. "In any of these moments, it will always be the profound action, through which the culture of domination will be confronted, culturally" (FREIRE, 2018, p. 57).

So, this teamwork is essential for the realization of the Circles. It is important to emphasize that planning is always done with a dialogue between the groups and each group is responsible for a movement that develops throughout the Circle:

- 1) The first group is responsible for welcoming, problematizing and initial dynamics. This means surveying the social reality of teachers, problematizing the theme to be developed based on questions, videos, songs or dynamics. It is the unveiling of reality.
- 2) The second group is responsible for inviting a partner teacher, whether this is a professor from the University of Brasilia, from another public school or a scholar on the subject. This partner will have a moment of speech in the Circle, but it is emphasized that this speech is not intended to be a class, to pass on ready-made models or to pass on teachings to CE teachers, as an educator would be in the "banking" conception of education (FREIRE, 2018).

Their action, identifying themselves from the outset with that of the students, must be oriented towards the humanization of both. Of authentic thinking and not in the sense of giving, of the surrender of knowledge. Its action must be infused with a deep belief in men, a belief in their creative power (idem, p. 86)

The objective, therefore, is to enable a dialogue and a broader view of the theme, either through the discussion of theoretical references or the sharing of experiences. This speech, moreover, occurs in order to raise a debate throughout it and after its completion, with a view to achieving a dialogical and horizontal movement between the three groups present: the partner teacher, the basic education teachers and the UnB group.

- 3) The third group makes a bibliographic survey of materials to deepen the theme. This survey is carried out together with the partner teacher and aims to enable a greater understanding of the subject. It is understood that the exit from common sense to philosophical consciousness occurs from the mediation of the abstract (SAVIANI, 2013) and that the Circles develop from movements of action-reflection-action (FREIRE, 2018), that is, from the opposition between everyday

knowledge, fruits of experience and prior knowledge, and scientific knowledge, it is possible to develop a critical pedagogical action with a view to social transformation.

- 4) The fourth group, on the other hand, aims to enable a synthesis, a catharsis of what was discussed throughout the Circle, based on dynamics or reflections. Catharsis is "the culmination of the educational process" (SAVIANI, 1999, p. 81 apud GASPARIN, 2015), it is the synthesis of the process, that is, it is the stage in which there is systematization and manifestation of the assimilated (GASPARIN, 2015). In this way, the expression of the new way of relating to social practice occurs. "We are convinced [...] that reflection, if it is truly reflection, leads to practice" (FREIRE, 2018, p. 73), since "the critical analysis of a meaningful-existential dimension enables individuals to take a new, also critical, stance in the face of 'borderline situations'" (idem, p. 134).
- 5) The fifth group has transversal action to the development of the Circle, and is therefore not limited to a specific moment. The members of this group are responsible for mediating the entire meeting and managing time. The intentionality of this action is highlighted, as well as the overcoming of the educator-student contradiction (FREIRE, 2018).
- 6) The sixth group is responsible for making a record of the meeting, through photographs and a report.

Another essential element for the development of the Project is evaluation. This is done after each Circle, in a meeting at UnB with the extension workers, and at the end of each semester of the Formative Circles, with the teachers of basic education, through mixed questionnaires and interviews, and with the undergraduate students, from the writing of an educational memorial, in which all the formative circles are described, that occurred during the semester, the trajectory throughout the process, the synthesis of the texts read, a self-evaluation and a critical reflection on the individual and collective work during the meetings.

In this context, the Formative Circle intends to be a space for democratic experience, of forms of thoughts, experiences, languages, theorization and life, which enables the establishment of effective conditions for the democracy of expressions, thoughts and logics based on respect for differences and encouragement of participation in a dynamic that launches the subject into debate, focusing on the problems of everyday school life, but understanding them in the totality of reality (COSTA et al, 2019, p. 348).

GENERATING THEMES OR TRAINING NEEDS?

From what was discussed in the previous topic, it is necessary to understand how the choice of themes to be worked on in each Circle is made. With the development of the Project in question, the concept of *training needs* was used to make this survey of the themes to be worked on in each semester of extension. From the understanding that the analysis of formative needs "tends to encompass a wide range of requisitions, situations, attempts at camouflage, representations that reveal or indicate formative needs" (GALINDO, 2012, p. 39, emphasis added), the relevance of the clarity of what formative needs are for their survey is perceived.

The term "need" is understood as the distance between a real and an ideal situation (LIMA, 2015), and can have an objective connotation (something indispensable) or subjective (which exists in the subject who feels the need) (PRÍNCEPE, 2010). In short, needs are representations, constructed by subjects historically inserted in a social context, of desires for change and needs, both considered as more appropriate states than the current ones (PRÍNCEPE and ANDRÉ, 2011; PRÍNCEPE, 2010).

Galindo (2012) presents three facets of the needs presented by teachers: the need perceived subjectively, as something that the professional presents in a unique and particular way, the demands of the educational system itself, and those that emerge from the contact between subject and reality.

Some training needs will then be those that will emerge in the relationship that educators establish with their contexts of action, with their peers, according to their values and beliefs, and also from their vision of how a training process should be that offers subsidies for their professional improvement (PRÍNCEPE, 2010, p. 64).

For Lima (2015), the term "formative need" would be dual and dialectical, thus corresponding to inherent aspects of the teaching profession that manifest themselves in the form of necessary and desire to obtain (LIMA, 2015). Therefore, formative needs would be dynamic and dialectical educational demands - since they are at the same time objective and subjective - situated in time and space, which are presented as representations mentally and socially constructed by the subjects and which are translated as difficulties, anxieties, problems, fears, aspirations and desires (GALINDO, 2012).

It is essential to reiterate that every need is situated (PRÍNCEPE, 2010), thus depending on the subjects involved – both those who express the needs and those who collect them -, contexts, methodologies of analysis and theoretical foundations.

Therefore, training needs to be considered from the educator's workplace, taking into account their conceptions, values, as well as their expectations in relation to their daily practice. The educator is given the possibility to reflect on the challenges he faces in the exercise of his function and, thus, contribute with elements that make it possible to think about a continuous education that is at the service of improving his professional practice (*idem*, p. 66).

Thus, training needs "cannot be seen as generic and universal because they are socio-historical" (GALINDO, 2012, p. 42).

Throughout the development of the Extension Project, it was noticed that in many moments what is pointed out by teachers as a formative need is, in fact, much more an individual affliction that arises from the school routine. These notes are consistent with the concept of "formative need", which is constituted from – but not limited to – the subjectivity of teachers. However, a concern arose within the group responsible for the development of the Project: how could we seek formative needs in the collectivity? In other words, how to seek training needs that are common, within their particularities, to the subjects involved in extension?

In the first semester of 2021, we surveyed the training needs, in a synchronous moment with the teachers who participated in the Training Circles, using as a tool a word cloud generated by the Mentimeter platform from key words or expressions recorded by these basic education subjects, in search of this common need:

Image: word cloud



Source: generated by the Mentimeter platform at the First Formative Circle of 2021, held on March 24, 2021.

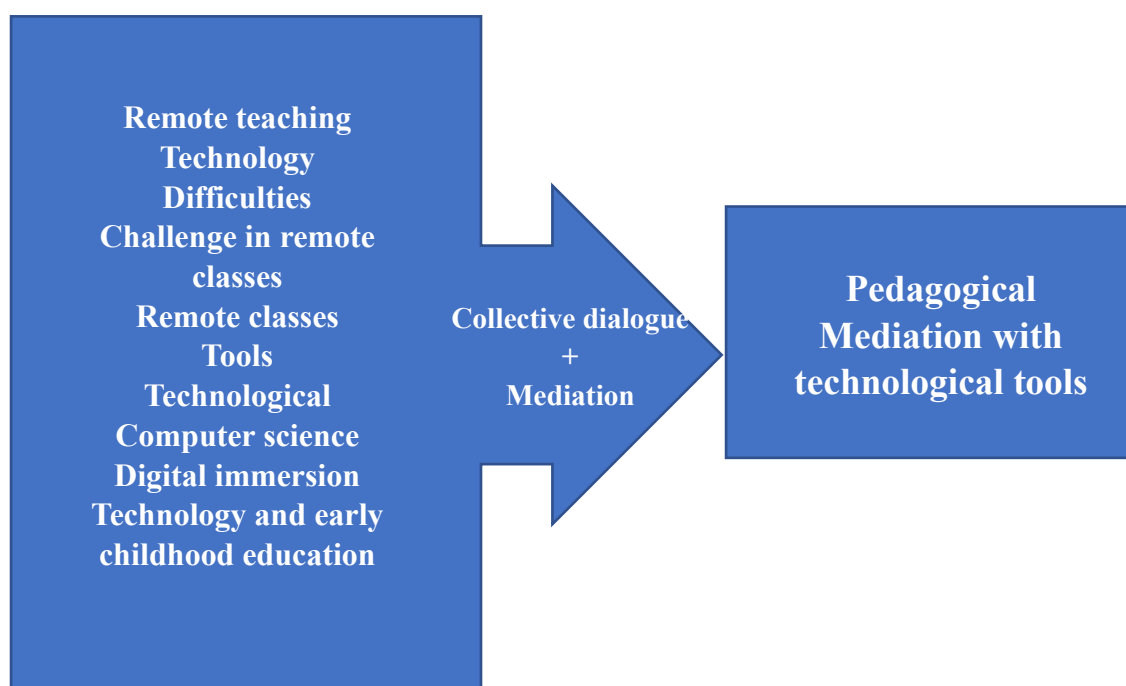
When analyzing the results, what stands out is that the teachers placed keywords that described their difficulties at the time of the meeting and that developed the ideas through problematizations:

In the sense of... Could it be that the same activities that we worked on in the classroom now in this context that the family has to mediate as well and... Is it possible for children to be reached with the same type of activity? That same model that we do in person and... Is it really viable in this virtual moment? In this sense. (speech by one of the teachers present in the Circle)

After the discussions and mediations of the group responsible for the development of the activity, the following theme was reached: Pedagogical Mediation with Technological Tools.

From the data exposed, the following conclusion was reached: as much as the keywords presented by the teachers were the result of formative needs, that is, dynamic and dialectical educational demands, what was sought to be built, in reality, were generating themes, and not formative needs, because it was from the unveiling of the social reality, the mediation of the responsible group and the search for a comprehensive collective theme, that the theme to be worked on was consolidated.

Flowchart: definition of the theme



Source: prepared by the author

The role of the mediator is resumed, who must provide a return of the elements he received in a disorganized way, systematizing them, organizing them and adding them (FREIRE, 2018), that is: "the task of the dialogic educator is, working in an interdisciplinary team this thematic universe collected in the investigation, to return it, as a problem, not as a dissertation" (idem, p. 142) to those from whom it received it; to sustain the idea that there was a process of pedagogical mediation in search of a generating theme, a programmatic content - necessarily coherent with the social reality in which the Circle occurs and with the problematizations raised by the subjects - which is general and can be broken down into several other themes.

From these considerations, the proposal arises to revise the methodology of the Extension Project in question, since "the method does not impose itself on reality, on each case, but it serves each new situation, hence the need to reinvent it" (TONIOLO and HENZ, 2017, p. 522). To approach the concept of "generating themes" is to reinforce the participation of the collective and the mediatizing social reality in the choice of content to be developed.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before making the final considerations, it is necessary to reinforce once again the inseparability between teaching-research-extension. Paulo Freire (2018, pp. 101-102, emphasis added) says that human beings are "beings who *are being*, as unfinished beings, inconclusive *in* and *with* a reality that, being historical as well, is equally unfinished". Therefore, the study and reflection on the Extension Project is a way of pointing out challenges and possibilities in the process of construction (COSTA et al, 2019), in addition to being an essential tool in the formative process of all the subjects involved, since we are inconclusive beings and that critical reflection is a form of action (FREIRE, 2018).

Thus, to discuss the Freirean foundation of the Project is to make explicit the possibility of establishing a horizontal dialogue in university extension, of building knowledge in a joint and non-hierarchical way and of providing a permanent education, initial and continuous, of the subjects involved. At the same time, it enables a transformation of practice and contributes to permanence in teaching. In addition, it is a way of unveiling the results and proposing more and more approximations to Paulo Freire's Culture Circles, spaces for dialogical, horizontal and liberating training.

"By making these considerations, we are trying nothing but to defend the eminently pedagogical character of the revolution" (FREIRE, 2018, p. 75), since liberation is only possible from the overcoming of the oppressor-oppressed contradiction, which requires the critical insertion of the oppressed in the oppressive reality, so that, by objectifying it, they can act on it and, consequently, transform it (idem).

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