

Deconstructing prejudice in schools: the role of dialogical practices

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Abstract

There seems to be a consensus among educators that dialogue is essential for pedagogical practice. However, the reality of classrooms tends to be different. For Cultural Psychology, monologism and heteronomy need to be replaced by dialogical practices. In this article, this topic is analyzed based on that theoretical perspective and the principles of dialogical psychology, illustrating our analysis with research data referring to an activity developed in a public school with the intended purpose of deconstructing prejudices. Despite the teachers' established objectives (the discussion of a short film) and even though they sought to value a dialogical attitude as a pedagogical practice, a monological practice was conducted. We discuss in theoretical terms why this tends to occur, hoping to contribute with educators by orienting them to listen, discuss, and reflect with students about topics such as the deconstruction of prejudices.

Keywords: Cultural psychology; Dialogism; Education; Prejudice.

As educators reflect on education, classrooms, and teacher-students' relations, they seem to agree, at least ideally, upon the fundamental role of promoting dialogue in their relations with students. However, are dialogues actually promoted by teachers? What does dialogue mean from the teachers' perspective after all? We often notice that teachers assume that learning occurs better when students "behave" as they do their tasks individually, only listening to the teacher's directions (Matusov, 2009). Therefore, there is a need to investigate what it means to take a dialogic attitude, instead of the monologic and heteronomous one usually found in educational contexts.

To elaborate that discussion, we must address some central theoretical grounds, which will later be illustrated by the analysis of data drawn from empirical research carried out by the article's first author under the supervision of the second. According to the Cultural Psychology (Bruner, 1990; Valsiner, 2014, 2019)

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grounded in Vygotsky's work (1991, 2018), human development emerges from the subject's interactions with the world, culture, and social others. Culture is not simply "transmitted" as a one-way venue in which the individual is merely a recipient of the content, ideas, and beliefs that he or she is taught. Marsico (2017, 2018), Valsiner (2014, 2019), and Zittoun and Gillespie (2015), among others, argue for the existence of a continuous co-constructive and reconstructive process of those messages emerging from social interactions, and this applies to teacher-students' interactions in classrooms as well.

From a cultural perspective, the notion of the active subject plays a central role. Individuals act as agents in the co-construction of their own development, knowledge, and culture; however, they do so under the impact of cultural canalization processes, which take place in the historical sociocultural contexts in which they live. Cultural canalization processes favor a person's development in particular directions, although the active and constructive nature of individual development works to generate new senses in the course of transformative internalizations of social messages, opening new possibilities along a person's developmental trajectory (Valsiner, 2014). In short, subject and culture are simultaneously distinct and interdependent (Marková et al., 2020; Valsiner, 2014, 2019; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015). We become human subjects because culture and society exist, and what we understand as intrinsic human characteristics are the result of our immersion in a relational, historical-cultural context (Vygotsky, 2018)

Cultural canalization processes mainly occur through processes of communication and meta-communication among people, which allow for a permanent construction of meaning between them. Through our interactions with others, we elaborate meanings related to the world around us and ourselves (Branco & Valsiner, 2004; Wortmeyer & Branco, 2019). Meanings also emerge from other aspects or characteristics of contexts that might generate constraints or suggestions – ever culturally significant ones – which participate in the person's development. In the present article, among socio-culturally organized contexts, we focus on educational institutions and school practices, particularly stressing teacher-students' interactions and analyzing how such practices and interactions collaborate (or not) to preserve, or else deconstruct, all sorts of prejudices.

The dialogical perspective proposed and developed by Bakhtin (1986) has been helpful and productive in the domains of psychology (Hermans et al., 2017; Marková et al., 2020). According to Linell (2009), dialogue should be conceived as an interactive bidirectional process within contexts impregnated by tensions in affections and ideas, a process which is indispensable for successful teaching-learning processes (Vygotsky, 1991, 2018) and the promotion of human development. Through dialogue, we can question, oppose, and negotiate perspectives, and open new paths and developmental trajectories. However, the intrinsic tension that emerges from dialogic practices is challenging due to the problematization of ideas, beliefs, and values that take place in the analysis, reflection, and discussion occurring among people (Matusov, 2015a; Tiburi, 2015).

In contrast to monologic practices, in dialogue participants can cast doubts on, not just ideas, but on beliefs and values. As Tiburi (2015, p. 46, our translation)² puts it,

To dialogue is complicated because it does not mean only to speak and to listen, which is already challenging. [...] The complexities included in the act of listening derive from the fact that, through listening, I have access to other knowledge-construction processes. I become someone else.

Dialogue entails dynamics of conflicts and tensions emerging from different perspectives and positionings that facilitate novelties and significant transformations at both personal and collective levels in the cultural context. Hence, it is a vital aspect of education if we expect it to foster teaching-learning

² In the original text: "Dialogar é complicado justamente porque não se trata apenas de falar e ouvir, o que já é muito difícil. [...] a complexidade do ato de escutar está em que, por meio da escuta, entro em outros processos de conhecimento. Torno-me outra pessoa" (Tiburi, 2015, p. 46).

processes and students' development as a whole. To bring about meaningful teaching-learning experiences and development, it is necessary to favor students' interactions related to diverse ideas and perspectives, allowing them the opportunity to engage in activities leading to critical and active thinking about knowledge and events in general terms (Matusov, 2018; Valsiner, 2014).

Notwithstanding, intellectual and cognitive learning processes, along with knowledge construction are often over-emphasized in schools, and the role of motivational and affective dimensions of human development ends up being put aside as part of schools' goals (Branco, 2018). Thus, if we do not consider those affective processes that lie at the basis of teaching-learning experiences and social relations/interactions occurring within schools, we cannot identify and analyze central aspects to make sense of how students' developmental processes happen and how knowledge construction takes place within educational institutions. Therefore, it is imperative to analyze and pursue the best way to make sense of the affective-semiotic dimension (Valsiner, 2014) of such processes.

For investigating the ontogenesis of values and prejudices at an individual level, that is, how a person develops certain values and not others, Valsiner (2014) and Branco (2018) propose the mutual constitution of values and practices, and of the subject and the culture, through active internalization processes. To analyze the development of powerful signs able to guide and orient human development itself, Valsiner (2014) elaborated the Affective-Semiotic Regulatory model. This model is composed of different, nonlinear, and hierarchical regulatory levels, from which certain fields may become increasingly powerful and take up a quality that the author describes as hyper-generalized affective-semiotic fields. These consist of those values that, in the person's lifespan, guide their feelings, thoughts, and actions (Valsiner, 2014). As Valsiner (2014) points out, hyper-generalized affective-semiotic fields are powerful and complex values (and prejudices) that, being deeply rooted in the person's affective dimension, direct and guide human actions.

It is precisely in this affective-semiotic dimension that contexts of uncertainty generated by dialogue, such as those mentioned by Beghetto (2020), can have a significant impact. For instance, it is exceptionally challenging for teachers who want to encourage dialogues in their classrooms to promote democratic values, to become aware of what they are actually promoting with their verbal interactions, actions, and other meta-communicative expressions. Are their actions and interactions fostering or inhibiting true dialogues among their students? For example, a teacher may interfere when a bigger student is beating a smaller one. In order to "promote" respectful relations in the classroom, he loudly tells the attacker that he will be suspended to learn that he cannot beat up smaller peers. However, as the teacher does so, he is unknowingly taking advantage of his authority as an adult, implying that "bigger" people can have power over "smaller" people. Instead, he could have used the opportunity to talk and discuss with students about the need to solve conflicts in other ways, not necessarily punishing anyone.

Certainly, it is of utmost importance that violent, disrespectful interactions are interrupted for everyone's protection and it is not simple or easy to deal with situations like this on the spur of the moment. However, if the objective is not immediate but a long-term one, the best way to promote respect among students is by practicing dialogue. Inconsistencies, contradictions, and paradoxes are part of the human condition, and much is left out of individuals' awareness. That is why the affective roots of one's actions, including feelings, beliefs, values, and prejudices, must be carefully analyzed, especially if our goal is to generate changes towards practices of diversity inclusion and deconstruction of prejudices (Branco, 2018). As Branco (2021, p. 72, our translation)³ ponders,

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³ In the original text: "Além do papel preponderante da cultura, a psicologia cultural vem cada vez mais atribuindo um papel fundamental à dimensão afetiva do ser humano nos processos relativos ao seu desenvolvimento psicológico. [...] o destaque atribuído pela teoria à afetividade e aos processos de significação (semióticos) deu origem ao produtivo conceito de afetivo-semiótico para designar a própria qualidade fundante dos processos psicológicos" (Branco, 2021, p. 72).

Beyond the significant role played by culture, cultural psychology increasingly attributes a fundamental role to humans' affective dimension in processes related to their psychological development. [...] the emphasis put by the theory upon affectivity and (semiotic) meaning-making processes, gave birth to the fruitful concept of affective semiosis to indicate the very quality of psychological processes.

Innovative proposals from schools have tested various forms of including topics and contents related to the deconstruction of prejudice, hoping to encourage respect, empowerment, and citizenship within the school community through new educational practices. Nonetheless, this is a continuous and time-consuming process and not a one-time intervention, as revealed by numerous research projects (Alencar et al., 2016; Burk et al., 2018; Dugnani & Souza, 2016; Fernandes et al., 2016; Souza et al., 2018). Nuances and specificities need to be considered whenever goals are long-lasting, aiming at creating new forms of relating among people, where respect and human values prevail. Such transformation entails changes in culturally rooted values and beliefs. Careful work is needed to mobilize all the members of the school community socially and affectively, which in turn requires investigating and creating knowledge about which processes can effectively promote changes in people's values, prejudices, and positionings.

For instance, in the previous example, after the teacher interrupted the attack, he could have asked what its motivation was. By doing so, he would have given both students an opportunity to express and listen to each other's arguments. His genuine interest in listening to their perspectives could be the first step to establishing trust relationships among the three of them. This action could open possibilities for further dialogues in the future.

Moreover, taking these aspects into account suggests the relevance of investigating possible problems and obstacles that emerge as actual interventions happen in school contexts. After all, it is not easy to escape the traditional, vertical, and hegemonic logic inspiring the way schools and classrooms work if references and relevant knowledge are not available to suggest new possible alternatives to promote change. For this reason, it is crucial to do research on schools' experiences in implementing democratic practices, thus contributing to include diversity and to develop citizenship among members of the school community.

Schools like the one investigated here overcame the first barrier to implementing prejudice deconstruction projects, meaning they had the motivation to invest in actions to prevent problematic situations arising from prejudices such as racism, LGBTphobia, and sexism. Nevertheless, more research in cooperation with schools is necessary to construct knowledge of efficient strategies to deconstruct prejudices and anti-democratic beliefs within educational institutions. The project developed by Paula (2019) in her master's dissertation, under the supervision of this article's second author, aimed at doing exactly this. Paula investigated the enactment of a project by a public school located in Brasilia. The project's goal was to promote the discussion and reflection regarding topics such as sexism, racism, and LGBTphobia to empower students and encourage respect among them. To illustrate, we selected a specific activity from Paula's study to analyze, which exemplifies what we mean by deconstructing prejudices within schools.

Dialogic practice or display of ideas?

Data extracted to illustrate our point comes from the mentioned research, which was oriented by a qualitative approach (Valsiner, 2017). After authorization from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Brasília (CEP/UnB) (protocol nº 2.527.058), the research was carried out in a public Elementary School in Brasília, Brazil, including procedures such as participant observation registered in a field diary, interviews with educators, and a focus group session with 13 to 15 years-old adolescents. The researcher observed specific activities during four eighth grade and three ninth grade classes, as well as staff meetings and various school events, for a total of 58 hours. The activity selected for the present article lasted 1 hour and 40 minutes and

involved two teachers, two ninth grades, and three invited university students. It encompassed watching a short film (17 minutes) made by the three university students.

The goal of the activity was to promote a reflection and have a discussion on the film, which depicted a romance between two Black boys, intending to address issues of homophobia and racism. Here, to illustrate our analysis, a few extracts of the recorded data were selected. To preserve the participants' identities, pseudonyms are used.

Description and analysis of the audiovisual activity with students

The teachers Cesar and Julia introduced the university students to the classes explaining the activity's objective. After watching the movie, Julia and Cesar said they wanted "to give them [eighth- and ninth-graders] the opportunity to ask questions" and "to take the initiative regarding the discussion". However, the university students and teachers were so enthusiastic that students had little room to share their own feelings and ideas about the movie. For instance, in the first 30 minutes of the discussion, no active participation or student input was observed.

After the adults' speeches, Cesar asked if students had any questions to pose. One boy said they had no questions and asked to leave. Cesar said he should wait for the discussion to end, even if he had no questions and asked the class if anyone had found anything strange about the movie, in an effort to trigger a discussion. A few students raised their hands. Cesar asked one boy to speak out, and he said, "They will judge me as sexist, teacher!". Cesar asked if he was, to which the boy emphatically replied, "No!". The teacher shrugged, raised his eyebrows, and turned to the class saying nothing else. Another boy said: "Sort of heavy [...]." Both teachers asked him why, and he explained that "It is not normal for two men to be kissing each other." Immediately, a girl asked, "Why don't we find it strange when girls kiss each other but do when boys do the same?" At this point, many laughed, some said "True!" "Exactly!," and another girl answered, "Usually men have straight friends, not gay friends [...]"

Once more, the teachers tried to redirect the discussion by asking about their impressions. Julia asked if anyone had identified with any of the movie characters. A profound silence followed. Then a girl risked speaking her mind, "I was startled [...]." Immediately, Cesar replied with doubt and surprise in his voice, "Startled?!." The girl tried to explain herself by saying, "Oh [...] I am not used to seeing [...]" and stopped speaking. He asked her to speak further, but she refused to continue expressing her ideas and feelings.

Then, to encourage the debate – thus far counting only a few cautious, short interventions by students – the university students posed questions like "Is this film about love?", "Do black people love?", "Do you see many black people on TV, soap operas, in the movies?", "How does this influence your daily lives?" to which students replied with yes or no answers. Regarding the first two questions, some students said yes, the movie was about love and that Black people love. They also said they do not see many Black people on TV, but this does not impact their daily lives. When they said no to the last question, the adults seemed shocked and surprised, but no further question or discussion came along. Again, the teachers and the university students asked about the movie and their identification with it, but students remained quiet.

The activity ended with the adults speaking much more than students. Limited exchange of ideas or dialogue was observed and when students tried to say something, the adults rapidly, though maybe unknowingly, took the floor. The teachers thanked everyone and asked students to return to their classes.

Were the dialogic intentions translated into practice?

Though short, the movie activity allowed for the recognition of many indicators concerning challenges in implementing dialogic practices in schools. In other words, the challenge to translate educators' dialogic intentions into practice is substantial. Despite the initial intention to promote a debate on issues raised by the movie, the adults had consistent difficulties listening to students and engaging in proper discussion with them, which meant giving them opportunities to express their positionings about the movie and welcoming their diverse standings.

A monologic dynamic prevailed in the adult-students' interactions, one that ignored the meaningful tensions occurring among participants, tensions between different voices, and the affective-semiotic positionings of adolescents and adults. On the one hand, some students displayed their discomfort regarding the movie, revealing their estrangement and surprise, their difficulties to express and elaborate on the issues. On the other hand, adults made explicit their shock and surprise regarding students' opinions and positionings. The presence of university students did not seem to help improve the quality of the dialogue, for they posed questions one after the other, granting little time or space for students to respond.

It is worth mentioning the adults' genuine motivation and engagement to work with the school project. Providing students with the opportunity of watching and discussing that movie indicates their sensitivity to construct different and non-traditional practices with students. Their joy was evident during the activity, especially as they highlighted the importance of bridging the school and the university.

Curiously, the inherent tension in dialogical practices is not usually perceived by educators in their interactions with students (Wortmeyer & Branco, 2016, 2019). The teachers and university students were so absorbed by their own ideas and positionings concerning the importance of including and celebrating diversity that they became unaware of the fact they were not allowing students to genuinely participate in the dialogue as understood by Bakhtin (1986) and Linell (2009). When Cesar asked the student, "But are you sexist?", he left the boy little choice other than saying no. The teacher's body language, facial expression, and tone of voice meta-communicated his disapproval, startle, and judgment, inhibiting the boy's honest expression.

Students brought voices that were dissonant from the voices of adults, full of bewilderment and estrangement, since the film dealt with themes associated with cultural taboos that are rarely discussed in the school. It should not be surprising to teachers that students would be somewhat startled and would react with a certain astonishment. After all, artistic experiences have the potential to provoke wonder and make people think about subjects never thought of before (Madureira, 2016; Souza et al., 2018). As Souza et al. (2018, p. 380, our translation)⁴ put it, "Experiencing contradiction is what fosters new meanings, overcoming previous feelings and thoughts, and, with their appropriation, allows the construction of new connections or relations, extending one's understanding of reality".

In sum, students' reactions were not in themselves a surprise. What was surprising was how the adults, mediators of the discussion, dealt with these reactions, failing to sustain a dialogue that, in fact, opened the possibility of investigating these reactions. For Bakhtin (1986), dialogue is a shared experience where questions are followed by other questions originating a continuous chain of mutual collaboration and openness to novelties. Dialogue encompasses relations between questions and answers, assertions and controversies, agreement, and disagreement, in the search for new learning experiences (Bakhtin, 1986). That was not observed in that activity.

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⁴ In the original text: "A vivência da contradição é o que promove novas significações, superando a condição anterior de sentimento e pensamento, para, incorporando-os, construir novos nexos ou relações e ampliar a compreensão da realidade" (Souza et al., 2018, p. 380).

Students' monosyllabic answers and their difficulties in elaborating ideas, in opposition to dialogue's core characteristics (Bakhtin, 1986), indicated how far from dialogic the activity was. Gomes et al. (2018) argue that the way students answer to different voices within the school context says a lot about the type of educational identity encouraged in the context. For Cultural Psychology, subjects are eminently active and responsive in their learning processes. That is, they actively produce answers about those meanings affecting them in their school experiences (Gomes et al., 2018; Valsiner, 2014). Consequently, we conclude that the identity promoted in that specific setting is characteristically passive and related to the traditional education model.

During the activity, a moralization of the other's affection was observed, however unintentional it might have been, as if the students were not allowed to feel scared. Expressions of moral judgment and values tend to be more powerful when performed by nonverbal communication (Branco, 2018). Facial expressions, body posture, voice tone, and other nonverbal indicators, communicate specific moral values. This indicates, therefore, that the construction and deconstruction of values and prejudices do not take place through the simple exposition of ideas, contents, or moral indoctrination (Moreira & Branco, 2016).

To elaborate on Cultural Psychology and dialogism's contributions to education, it is worth mentioning that the emphasis on cognition and the "transmission" of the curriculum contents by educational institutions make accomplishing educational goals such as the deconstruction of prejudice, more difficult. Investigating how dialogic practices contribute to transforming the school and for theoretical advances in psychology of education (Marsico, 2018) is a necessary step. It is not enough to count solely on the educators' motivation. As discussed, teachers were highly motivated to discuss sensitive topics (homosexuality and racism, as presented in the movie) and to promote mutual respect in the school context. Unfortunately, the habit of teaching by adopting monologic practices, with teachers seeking to convince students (Matusov, 2009), creates difficulties in developing true dialogues with students, as pointed in the example.

To better understand the difficulties the educators found, we must highlight the power of affective-semiotic fields (Valsiner, 2014), which give rise to values and prejudices that may lead to monologic positionings, that resist changes, as they become hyper-generalized. For instance, even when teachers value dialogical practices as was the case, the translation of intentions into practices may not follow. Often teachers are not aware of this incoherence. What happens when they do not listen to students' positionings that are different from their own?

In our example, the adults did not notice that they had acted as if expecting students to provide them with the "right" or more appropriate answer, which was in accordance with those values that they wanted to encourage. To inculcate students with one's values and discourses, though, definitely goes against any attempt to engage people in dialogical practices. In such practices, there is openness to ideas and positionings to be examined. When divergent thinking or positionings are not welcome, the active, creative, and autonomous role of students is not taken into account, resulting in no serious reflections or actual co-participation of everyone (Linell, 2009; Matusov, 2015b), which hinders the chance of an actual change of perspectives.

Adopting dialogue as an open system (Linell, 2009; Marková et al., 2020) means that the teacher does not know what will happen next when initiating a discussion. In this scenario, everybody participating in the learning community (Matusov, 2018) can benefit from it and have access to multiple perspectives about the subject, thereby fostering their motivation, creativity, and development (Matusov, 2009, 2015b; Valsiner, 2014). In this sense, activities structured and planned to be open to uncertainties, as Beghetto (2020) suggests, are productive pathways to translate dialogic intentions into practices. After all, what provokes more uncertainty than a genuine openness to engage in dialogue?

There are moments in schools' everyday lives, though, when such radical, open dialogues may not be that productive. That is why we do not argue for a generalized use of ontological dialogic practices in all

circumstances. When information concerning specific topics is exposed, problem-solving and other abilities are the target of the activity, directive practices may prove more beneficial (Matusov, 2009). Monologism and dialogism should be conceived as poles of a continuous axis, instead of static dichotomic positions (Linell, 2009). Nevertheless, the benefits of adopting dialogic practices for knowledge construction and human development are undoubtedly relevant.

There is a vast difference when monologic practices eventually take place in a broader dialogic context. Directive practices are more effective when they occur in a general context of dialogic constructive relations between teachers and students (Branco, 2018; Marková et al., 2020). The dialogic atmosphere is essential for the socio-affective and moral development of students, as well as for the deconstruction of prejudices. Moreover, it is paramount that educators monitor their own values and beliefs and the way these guide their actions, interactions, and relations in the classroom. This process can be done by educators' continuing self-analysis, which should be stimulated and supported by the institution, as, for example, when schools organize meetings where teachers and other educators can exchange ideas and experiences, cooperating with each other. When this does not happen, contradictory practices may hinder accomplishing the school's socio-moral goals. According to Branco (2018), despite educators' claims regarding the relevance of the dialogue, their practices reveal otherwise. When they do not perceive it clearly, they become convinced that they are promoting dialogical practices in their classrooms. This misperception happens precisely because particularly powerful internalized affective-semiotic fields easily escape individuals' awareness.

When discussing homophobia in schools and the tension between practices and good intentions in education, Junqueira (2009, p. 14, our translation)⁵ warns that,

We should ask ourselves how we, who long for justice, for the end of prejudices and violence, are involved in the very phenomena we are fighting against, even without awareness of it. We cannot lose sight of the fact that interventions centered solely on our good pedagogical intentions or the generically redeeming power of education usually contribute to reproducing the situation of oppression against which we struggle.

The author refers to the power relations in which we are all inserted, impregnated with subtle prejudices that often go unnoticed due to their culturally naturalized nature. Junqueira (2009) adds that educators frequently invest their good intentions in actions that end up reinforcing unequal power relations, generating discrimination and domination, and therefore inciting anti-democratic systems (such as schools). For this reason, it is so important to analyze the potential obstacles emerging as well-intentioned projects to deconstruct prejudices are put into practice. Only providing information and establishing heteronomous rules against discrimination will not work in disabling cultural, affectively rooted positionings.

As Matusov (2009) argues, traditional pedagogical practices and beliefs in which solely teachers hold the knowledge and wisdom to be directly transmitted to students needs reviewing. This is also true when the goal is to deconstruct prejudices and foster diversity inclusion and mutual respect among people.

Final Considerations

This article focused on analyzing prejudice deconstruction in school contexts from a dialogical and Cultural Psychology perspective. Issues concerning the structure and the quality of educators-students' interactions were examined, especially considering monologic ones, which tend to hamper the development

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⁵ In the original text: "*Teríamos que nos perguntar como nós que clamamos por justiça, pelo fim de preconceitos e violência estamos, mesmo sem saber, envolvidos com aquilo contra o que procuramos lutar. Não podemos perder de vista que intervenções centradas, única ou principalmente, em nossas boas intenções pedagógicas ou no poder genericamente redentor da educação costumam contribuir para reproduzir o quadro de opressão contra o qual nos batemos*" (Junqueira, 2009, p. 14).

of processes related to the transformation of values and prejudices. By analyzing tensions and contradictions in social interactions, we conclude that good intentions, wishes, and goals are not enough to promote dialogues and reflexive processes able to yield affective positionings and dispositional changes concerning prejudices.

Beliefs and world views, values, and prejudices, are undoubtedly present within schools and can be observed in interactions and relations among the people in the school community. Such values are historically engendered in societies' cultural contexts, and as highly affect-laden, they resist change. Hence, it is challenging to implement different or new practices in schools without unnoticedly slipping into monologic, vertical paradigms typical of traditional pedagogy. That is why educators need to be attentive to those values and beliefs that guide their practices. Otherwise, there is the risk of creating fuzzy, contradictory messages to students, for instance, to praise the wonders of dialogical practices and, simultaneously, to interact with students in different ways. To experience ambiguity and contradiction may generate feelings of insecurity, discomfort, and distrust. When such tensions are not dialogically analyzed and discussed with students, it becomes hard to facilitate democratic experiences and prejudice deconstruction.

As argued in this article, according to a semiotic Cultural Psychology approach, values and prejudices consist of hyper-generalized affective-semiotic fields deeply rooted in the affective dimension. Therefore, specific practices and procedures are needed in order to mobilize ingrained affects and lead to reflective and re-signifying processes. Lectures and norm-based arguments do not achieve this. Instead, the consistent adoption of dialogic practices is what seems effective in creating a welcoming context.

As educators pursue coherence and consistency in their work, they may have a greater chance to encourage mutual respect and a sense of community, therefore favoring the appreciation of diversity and trust relationships among the people in schools. In other words, educators need support to face challenges and develop dialogic practices in their work with students. Organizing a supportive network for teachers would help them exchange experiences and learn together. It is not reasonable to expect teachers to engage in dialogic practices when they have not experienced such practices in their lives.

We illustrated our arguments by analyzing a specific activity to deconstruct prejudices in a Brazilian public school that implemented a project with such goals. The example demonstrated our theoretical analysis as it corroborated the idea that dialogic practices and interactions which allow space for respecting and listening to each other's perspectives, positionings and values, are necessary to instigate changes in those affections that feed into prejudices and values.

In our perspective, investigations on how to promote mutual respect and prejudice deconstruction within schools are the best way to pave the ground for identifying the processes participating in the creation of social practices and strategies able to foster inclusion and democracy in societies at large. It is particularly productive to study and make sense of students' and their families' views on these topics, and the resulting knowledge, in collaboration with staff members and educators. That may help constructing more democratic institutions where differences are placed in dialogues that, in turn, encourage mutual respect, equity and justice, taking people's multiple voices and experiences into account.

Contributors

Both authors had equal participation in writing the present manuscript, including its conception, design, analysis, data interpretation, and discussion elaboration.

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