Reflections on Exploratory Practice and the Affective Mind: The Exploratory Meeting as a Niche to the Construction of Affective Scaffolding in Pandemic Times

Reflexões sobre a Prática Exploratória e a Mente Afetiva: O Encontro Exploratório como Nicho para a Construção de Andaimes Afetivos em Tempos de Pandemia

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Abstract: Exploratory Practice (EP), (ALLWRIGHT, 1991, 2006, 2008) is a teaching-learning and research approach, which encourages practitioners to generate understandings on issues related to quality of life that puzzle them in their personal and professional settings. Considering the impact of the Covid19 in our quality of life as practitioners, we analyze the interaction generated during one meeting of regular members of two groups of exploratory practitioners that occurred on May 27, 2020, on the virtual platform Zoom. Therefore, these Communities of Exploratory Practice interact in meetings as affective niches (STERELNY, 2010), following EP's principle related to understanding life in the language classroom. Thus, this study focuses on the way the community members expressed their feelings as well as how and through what strategies support and affective scaffoldings were provided through discourse.

Keywords: Exploratory Practice; quality of life during the pandemic; affective mind; Niche construction; affective Scaffolding

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Resumo: A Prática Exploratória (ALLWRIGHT, 1991. 2006, 2008) é uma abordagem para o ensino-aprendizagem e pesquisa que encoraja os praticantes a gerarem entendimentos acerca de questões relacionadas à qualidade de vida que os intrigam em seus contextos pessoais e profissionais. Considerando o impacto da Covid19 em nossas vidas de professores e alunos, analisamos a interação ocorrida em uma reunião com a participação de membros de dois grupos de praticantes exploratórios ocorrida no dia 27 de maio de 2020 através da plataforma virtual Zoom. Assim, essas Comunidades de Prática Exploratória interagem em encontros que são nichos afetivos (STERELNY, 2010), seguindo o princípio da PE relacionado à compreensão da vida em sala de aula de línguas. Dessa forma, este estudo foca na forma como e através de quais estratégias os membros dessa comunidade expressaram seus sentimentos e ofereceram suporte e andaimes afetivos através do discurso.

Palavras-chave: Prática Exploratória; qualidade de vida durante a pandemia; mente afetiva; construção de nicho; andaime afetivo.

> "Now we have to learn to 'disembrace' (Esperança)
> But it's another kind of embrace, the embrace with the eyes, the embrace of the disposition to help, it is another kind of embrace. It's impossible to substitute [...] we will have to invent other things.
>
> (Beba)
>
>
> Reinvent (Sara)"
>
> (Exploratory Practice meeting – 2020)

1 Introduction

Exploratory Practice, since the 1990's, has been urging practitioners to be researchers of their own practices, focusing on the quality of life they live in their professional settings. Likewise, Exploratory Practice encourages practitioners to view themselves as knowledge-makers for their own sake, that is, to work to understand the sort of life they are living, the factors that affect the quality of life in their classrooms (and sometimes even outside as we will see later). It is seen as both an approach to teaching-learning and as an approach to doing research in a hybrid fashion in the field of contemporary Applied Linguistics. Aligned with Miller (2012), we see that Exploratory Practice bears this hybrid ethos since its very beginning when Allwright encouraged the integration of teaching-learning practices to reflection by using the same activities devised to teach linguistic contents. This idea was extended later when Exploratory Practice walked into the academy to base the design of some research - thus biding investigative, critical,

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and reflexive practices, as well as establishing fruitful dialogues with ethnography, auto-ethnography , case study, in the realm of qualitative research.

Considering the impact of the Covid19 in our quality of life as teachers and students, we aim at analyzing the interactions of the meeting that occurred on May 27, 2020, which gathered researchers, teachers of the public and private sectors, some undergraduate and graduate students. This meeting happened on the virtual platform Zoom and, as EP practitioners, we became interested in building intelligibility on both groups' discourse moves to understand the life they were living at that moment and how it affected the members' quality of life as individuals. Therefore, we decided to analyze excerpts of this interaction in order to map and later generate understandings[1] on the way the community members expressed their feelings and how these members provided support and affective scaffoldings. As a result, we observed why the interactions seemed to provide affective scaffoldings, which had some influence on the members' personal and professional quality of life. We developed these understandings as we selected and analyzed some excerpts of the interaction occurred during the meeting, considering the language/discourse used, the narratives told as well as strategies used by participants to offer support in the distance. In order to reach our aims, besides using the tenets of Exploratory Practice, and following the interdisciplinary stance of Applied Linguistics, we will bring to discussion some constructs from the field of Philosophical Psychology, Social Historical Psychology, and Psychology, starting next section.

However, before actually starting this discussion, we want to explain the use of the word affect in this article. As it will be seen in section 3, in which we discuss some theories on affect and emotion, there are authors such as Tomkins, in psychology, who uses the term affect , while Damásio, in the field of neuroscience, opts for the use of emotion. Both do it for reasons that are related to their research areas. For this article, we use the term affect, more than emotion, following Arnold and Brown's understanding of affect.

2 Exploratory Practice and its ethos

The principles of Exploratory Practice (henceforth EP) do not serve as mere references to help design and develop the approach to teaching-learning, research and reflection. They are "ways to prioritize the ethical and epistemological

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[1] It is part of the Exploratory Practice ethos to use the word "understandings", in the plural form.

dimensions of what we were [are] trying to do" (ALLWRIGHT, 2008, p. 140 - our addition in square brackets). The principles help EP practitioners act with tact, cast a careful look at their practices, and listen carefully to the voices of students, colleagues once what is said by practitioners can help us construct understandings that may help us move forward taking care of our humanity since life is continuous and requires of us all a lifelong effort to understand it.

The set of principles that underpin the practitioners' exploratory work to understand the issues that intrigue them (ALLWRIGHT 2008, p.141) are the ones below. Although they received numbers , they are equally important and must be seen as integrated dimensions that compose the work for understanding:

Principle 1: Put quality of life first.
Principle 2: Work primarily to understand life, in the language classroom.
Principle 3: Involve everybody.
Principle 4: Work to bring people together.
Principle 5: Work also for mutual development.
Principle 6: Make the work continuous.

These principles were not proposed by Allwright alone. They were the result of various talks and discussions that involved teachers, professors, and students in Brazil, in England as well as Allwright himself. These principles were presented together with the following suggestions: 1- Minimize the extra effort of all sorts for all concerned; 2- Integrate the 'work for understanding' into the existing working life of the classroom (ALLWRIGHT, 2008, 141). Later, these suggestions became the seventh principle that is stated as follows: Principle 7: Integrate the work for understanding fully into existing curricular practices to minimize the burden and maximize sustainability. These principles are used as a framework for research design and for teacher education (see RODRIGUES, 2014; SANTOS, 2018; VIANA, 2021, among others). They lead our process of participating in our exploratory community of practice, reflect about the life we live with our students and colleagues in this community and in our educational contexts.

It is worth presenting the practitioners that are going to be the focus of our reflections and whose interaction will be analyzed later. In Rio de Janeiro, there are two groups of teachers and students that compose this Community of Exploratory Practice [CoEP]. The older one is called *Grupo de Prática Exploratória do Rio de Janeiro* and is based at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio). The younger is called *Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisa de Prática Exploratória*, based at the Faculdade de Formação de Professores - State University of Rio de

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Janeiro (UERJ). Academic and friendship bonds link both groups, which are used to gathering in meetings - each one in their original academic context, but they visit each other whenever possible - to discuss issues that puzzle them regarding the lives they live in educational and professional settings. These groups, to which we belong, involve knowledge, membership, stories, practices, affective and emotional ties as well as beliefs.

We adopt the notion of community of practice as proposed by Lave and Wenger ([1991]2008) and Wenger ([1998]2008) because those groups are engaged in the pursuit of enterprises; developing practices; learning together - having peripheral participation that, in the long run, turn into a more central one; developing and preserving a sense of themselves; constructing identities. Furthermore, we also draw on Wenger, McDermott e Snyder (2002, p.4) who describe communities of practice as:

> [...] groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (...)These people don't necessarily work together every day, but they meet because they find value in their interactions. As they spend time together, they typically share information, insight and advice. They help each other solve problems. They discuss their situations, their aspirations, and their needs.

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) also adopted the notion of community of practice highlighting the important role language plays in it, if one takes social engagement as its central issue, for "it is this engagement that language serves, not the place and not the people as a bunch of individuals" (ECKERT; McCONNELL-GINET, 1992, p. 7). Therefore, a community of practice is "an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in some common endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations - in short, practices - emerge in the course of their joint activity around that endeavor" (ibid, p.8). Regarding the joint enterprises that link the members, Wenger ([1998]2008) reminds us it is a process that can be both generative and constraining. Besides, "it involves our impulses and emotions as much as it controls them, [...] invite new ideas" (ibid). The enterprise is also a resource of sense-making and mutual engagement. Different members take part in different communities of practice with different forms of participation, favoring mutual recognition among the members.

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Each aspect pointed out serves us in two ways: the first one is to characterize both groups as one CoEP ; the second one is a corollary of the first, that is, due to being considered a CoEP, we cast a glance at the reflective process entangled in the practice of gathering to study and link these theoretical issues to our professional and personal lives. Among them , we emphasize engagement, language and emotion. The meeting whose excerpts will be analyzed had the participation of members of the two EP groups introduced above. It happened after the two initial months of the Covid19 pandemic when we were all trying to survive and learn how to teach and learn, how to continue with our academic lives in another environment: the virtual platforms made available to teachers and students.

Like many teachers around the planet, we had to face difficulties regarding the demands of online classes. However, we suffered as we witnessed our students struggle to maintain the internet connection, to learn their ways through the platforms where the classes happened or the teaching material was uploaded for retrieval. As most of the members of both groups are women, having to take care of their families and maintain the 'routine' at home have become a burden during the pandemic. Besides, we have suffered the impact of having family members, friends and colleagues become infected by the Covid19 virus, not to mention the impact of the increasing number of deaths. We have been living a poor quality of life that is leading many teachers and students to burnout .

Mentioning burnout takes us back to 2008 when Allwright (2008, p. 128) called attention to burnout as the reason "for the current conditions of service for teachers, and nothing to do with their initial training". For him, burnout is "a threat to the 'human quality of life' for teachers currently in service". Allwright also identified some sources of burnout: the workload teachers have in terms of the number of teaching hours, different jobs, as well as public and private institutions' methodological initiatives and their statistical achievement targets. We add to this discussion about burnout and teachers Miller's (2013) words when she mentions how pre-service teachers suffer as they receive different treatment at the university - where they are considered students and future colleagues - while at school, during internship, sometimes they are treated as teachers and as students at the same time.

Moreover, there are teachers who suffer because they see the way they teach does not cater for the students' real needs; nonetheless, for institutional reasons, they cannot do otherwise. Others suffer because they would like to take the students' and their own feelings into account, but they must stick to the content, to the lesson plan and to the techniques that are validated in that setting. In pandemic times, we add the issues mentioned in the previous paragraph, which

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have been hurting teachers of all levels. As Allwright puts it , "the quality of their lives as teachers is under threat, and perhaps seriously compromised" (ibid., p. 130). Quality of classroom life - whether in-person or virtual - is important "both for the long-term mental health of humanity and for the sake of encouraging people to be lifelong learners" (ALLWRIGHT, 2006, p. 14-15). This statement surely puts affect at the core of quality of life. To our concern, quality of life must be viewed as a process, socio-historically marked, encompassing a cline that ranges from poor to good quality of life. Moreover, quality of life encompasses not only the life lived inside but also outside the classroom - or a study group - since both lives are interwoven. We believe that quality of life is geared towards human interaction, the nature of our relation in these settings, human and professional relations that are constructed within and through discourse.

Therefore, quality of life ends up being central (ALLWRIGHT 2008, p.128): i) "not only to teachers but also to learners" - because teachers and students are pushed by different pressures in the educational setting; ii) "not just to happiness but also to efficiency/productivity" – since having a friendly atmosphere, building a teaching-learning setting where the word circulates, where respect is not imposed and may foster well-being has a possible positive influence on the outcomes of the teaching-learning process. However it is necessary to mention that putting quality of life first may be a good terrain to efficiency and productivity but it is not related to control or to using the right techniques, t o solving problems without making a serious move towards understanding; iii) "not just to short term educational outcomes but also to long term-ones" - because good or poor quality of life influences the outcomes anyway.

3 Affect and Emotion

Our human's constant interaction with the world influences the way we feel and search for the company of others for emotional comfort. Thus, we manipulate the environment for affective effects. According to Arnold and Brown (2005, apud ARNOLD, 2005) the term 'affect' shelters aspects of emotions, feeling, mood or attitude which shape and condition behavior. Throughout history, affect has been conceptualized in two perspectives. The first stems from psychology and neuroscience, and it views affect as an elemental state, as in Damásio's theory of basic emotions (1999) and Tomkin's (1982) theory of primary affects. The second perspective is associated with studies in philosophy and the humanities and regards affect as an "intensive force" (OTT, 2017). Tomkin (1982, p.354-

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355) defends that affect is "the primary motivational system, an innate biological mechanism, more urgent than drive deprivation and pleasure, and more urgent than physical pain". He identified nine primary affects, which have been distributed into the categories of positive (interest-excitement; enjoyment-joy), neutral (surprise-startle) and negative (distress-anguish; fear-terror; anger-rage; shame-humiliation; disgust; dissmell[2]). Therefore, affects are triggered by the intensity of neural firing coupled with an internal or external stimulus. Unlike Tomkins, Antonio Damásio does not use the term "affect". He has constructed his theory of basic emotions, which posits that emotion is central to cognition. According to the author, emotions are "complex automated programs of actions concocted by evolution" (DAMÁSIO, 2010, p. 108).

Damásio distinguishes between emotions and feelings in that the second refers to "composite perceptions of what happens in our body and mind when we are emoting" (2010, p. 109). Moreover, emotions involve changes in body state while feelings entail the perception of what is going on in the body. The author defends the existence of three categories of emotions: background emotions, primary emotions, and secondary emotions. Background emotions refer to one's general orientation, such as enthusiasm or discouragement. Primary or basic emotions entail the state of fear, anger, disgust, surprise, sadness, and happiness. The third category includes compassion, embarrassment, guilt, shame, contempt, jealousy, envy, pride, and admiration.

As intensive forces, affect and emotion are associated with developments in disciplines such as literature, art history, communication, and cultural studies. In Deleuze and Guattari's view (1994), affect involves "the change, or variation, that occurs when bodies collide, or come into contact" (apud COLMAN, 2010, p.11). Consequently, their conceptualization of affect calls for a view of 'body' which is defined as an individual entity, distinguished from others regarding motion and rest. As a result, human or nonhuman things can represent bodies in that they are able to affect and be affected. According to Kennedy (2000, p. 98), bodies "might be technological, material, organic, cultural, sociological, or molecular". Several authors hold different views of affect as intensive force (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1994; MASSUMI, 2002; THRIFT, 2008). However, they share a common set of assumptions: i) affect is seen as a way of thinking; ii) affect occurs at the level of bodies; iii) affect encompasses emotion; iiii) affect requires a "material aesthetics".

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[2]   Dissmell is a neologism coined by Tomkins that relates to a reaction to bad odors.

The two perspectives just described stand at dominant positions. Nevertheless, there are middle grounds of inquiry into affect, which will not be included in this article, for further reading, see OTT (2017).

We align with Arnold and Brown's concept of affect ([1999]2005), which constitutes an umbrella term that shelters aspects of emotions, feelings, mood, and attitude. Likewise, we defend a holistic view towards affect, which encompasses physical, psychological, and sociocultural aspects. In line with Alba-Juez and Mackenzie (2019), we focus on the "discursive manifestations of emotion" (p. 15). Thus, affect is regarded as a dynamic and multifaceted discourse process that involves cognition, physical and verbal behavior as well as the social context. Therefore, it calls for a multimodal analysis that embraces as many of the features as possible. In this study, affect will be related to the construction of affective scaffolding (SAARINEN, 2020)[3] in the EP meeting niche (STERELNY, 2010), considering the concept of affective labor (HARDT, 1999), language and narratives (OCHS, 1988; BRUNER, 1991).

3.1 Affective scaffolding

The term scaffolding was first presented by David Wood, Jerome Brunner and Gail Ross in 1976 (PEA, 2004). The authors sought to explain babies' meaning acquisition through parent-child early interactions (WOOD et al, 1976). They also analyzed an interaction between a tutor and a child while constructing a wooden pyramidal puzzle and observed there was a process of 'scaffolding', which enabled the child to complete the task that s/he would not be able to without assistance.

The concept of 'scaffolding' is not only related to people's actions, but also to the various ways our cognitions, affects, or actions are supported, regulated, augmented and enhanced by the environment (CLARK, 1997; COLOMBETTI,

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[3] Back in 2003, Rosiek, a researcher on education, published an article in which he reflected on teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and how teachers cared about students' emotion in their decision- making process regarding lesson planning and teaching. The author used the term 'emotional scaffolding' and conceptualized it as follows: "Emotional scaffolding, for the purpose of this study, is defined as teachers' pedagogical use of analogies, metaphors, and narratives to influence students' emotional response to specific aspects of the subject matter, in a way that promotes student learning." (ROSIEK, 2003, p. 402). Therefore, Rosiek's concept and use of this term is not the same as Saarinen's and other authors' understanding of affective scaffolding as it will be seen in section 3.1.

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2017; COLOMBETTI & KRUEGER, 2015). Mascolo (2005) suggests there are different types of scaffolding: social scaffolding, ecological scaffolding and self-scaffolding. The first refers to how the process of exchange between people happens. The second, also named 'naturalistic scaffolding' is described as "the use of naturally occurring environmental features in their unaltered state to aid in acting" (MASCOLO, 2005, p. 190). Self-scaffolding suggests that the individual's actions reformulate meanings and perspectives. The author mentions "coactive scaffolding" to refer to the cognitive resources that become available "when elements of the person – environment system beyond the direct control of an individual actor direct or channelize the construction of action in novel and unanticipated ways" (MASCOLO, 2005, p. 187).

3.2 Niche Construction and the Exploratory Affective Scaffolding

According to Sterelny (2010, apud COLOMBETTI; KRUEGER, 2014), the mind is scaffolded by the environment, which means that cognitive beings engineer their environment to keep and increase their cognitive abilities. Hence, the environment should not be regarded as a mere background source of input, since it plays a decisive role in supporting mental processes (SAARINEN, 2020). Therefore, the scaffolded mind is characterized by the niche-construction model (ODLING-SMEE et al., 2003), which refers to the way organisms transform their selective environments to amplify their chance of survival.

The concept of niche construction has been applied in philosophy of mind to analyze and understand how humans manipulate the social, material, cultural and epistemic environment to sustain and develop their psychological and experiential capabilities (STERELNY, 2010; CLARK, 2006; COLOMBETTI & KRUEGER, 2015). Thus, social organization is also a form of niche construction for it contributes to create a set of conditions to change the selective scenario. Moreover, we, humans, build niches to scaffold our minds, because they stress our own agency in influencing the way we come to think and feel (SAARINEN, 2020).

Niches and the scaffolding process share some interrelated dimensions (SUTTON, 2016; GRYFFITHS & SCARANTINO, 2009; COLOMBETTI & KRUEGER, 2015). The first dimension focuses on the environmental elements of niches, which include material and social resources that are used and engineered for scaffolding purposes. The second entails the influence of niches on timescales, that is, scaffoldings may be synchronic and diachronic. The first perspective is related to the real-time interaction between the cognitive being and the resource,

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while the diachronic perspective corresponds to actions over extended periods of time. The third dimension concerns the niches' domains of influence, be them cognitive and/or affective. Thus, learning, reasoning, decision-making, problem-solving, memory, among others are supported by the cognitive niche, whereas emotions, moods, bodily affective styles, background feelings, and the like are related to affective niche construction.

Both EP Research Groups mentioned in the introduction hold scheduled meetings in which their members engage in diversified activities such as reading and discussing texts, like books and academic articles, sharing puzzles and personal experiences regarding teaching, learning, and living. The meetings usually flow within their own rhythm, with the EP principles as the ethic-theoretical and philosophical background, embedded in an affective perspective. Considering that any social organization is an instance of niche construction, the CoEP meeting constitutes a niche in which affective scaffolding moments take place.

Although the scaffolded mind presents a certain degree of variation (STERELNY, 2010), three dimensions have been identified: trust, entrenchment, and collectivity. Trust refers to the degree of reliability of a certain resource perceived by the agent. The EP meetings hold this dimension since there is a sense of 'familiarity' among their members because they are aware of the type of affective feedback they expect to provide and receive. Consequently: "(...) members of a group may provide ongoing resources and feedback that scaffold the experience and expression of emotions unique to a certain context (...)" (COLOMBETTI & KRUEGER, 2015, p. 17). Entrenchment represents a continuum of deep connection between the highly individualized resource and the agent. It is related to the phenomenological concept of 'transparency' (see De PREESTER, 2011), in that the resource becomes incorporated into one's acting self.

When we consider the EP ethos, we may think of entrenchment both materially and interpersonally. The material perspective may be exemplified through the 'exploratory poster'[4], which constitutes an exploratory presentation/

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[4]   For more details on what an exploratory poster is please access the following links for the e-book produced by the *Grupo de Prática Exploratória* (PUC-Rio) both in the Portuguese and English versions:

Por que trabalhar para entender a vida em sala de aula?
(http://www.puc-rio.br/ensinopesq/ccg/licenciaturas/download/ebook_por-que-trabalhar-para-entender-a-vida-em-sala-de-aula_2021.pdf)
Why seek to understand life in the classroom? Experiences of the Exploratory Practice Group
(http://www.puc-rio.br/ensinopesq/ccg/licenciaturas/download/ebook_why_seek%20 to_understand_life_in_the_classroom_2021.pdf)

dissemination resource not only in the group gatherings but also in seminars, congresses, etc., since it is meant to hold individual or group puzzles and their respective understandings in an entrenched way. Likewise, the exploratory poster carries deep-rooted design features shared by the members of the research group, being hand-made most often, having students' drawings and activities answered by students or other participant, for instance. Thus, the meetings represent interpersonal entrenchment as they are built over a characteristic style of affective interaction, mainly based on the process of (co)constructing and sharing understandings over issues that arise during the exploratory conversations. The third dimension alludes to the extent to which the resource might be utilized by an individual or a community. Therefore, both EP research groups' meetings comprise niches in which understandings and affective scaffolding become intertwined.

3.3 The affective turn and affective labor

Hardt (1999, 2007), political philosopher and literary theorist, mentions the affective turn in the humanities and social sciences and its consequences to research. The author (2007, p. ix) states that "while extending previous research, this affective turn also opens new avenues for study, casts previous work in a fresh light, and indicates novel possibilities for politics". The focus on affect refers to the body and the mind, as well as to reason and the passions. Therefore, it is necessary to enter the realm of a complex view of causality since both illuminate our power to affect the world around us and to be affected by it, together with the relationship between these two powers.

Hardt (1999) mentions service jobs, in which he includes activities ranging from health care, education, finance to transportation, entertainment and advertising. These service jobs produce immaterial labor to which the affective labor of human contact and interaction is the other side. Hardt (1999, p. xi) affirms that affective labor encompasses "simultaneously the corporeal and intellectual aspects of the new forms of production, recognizing that such labor engages at once with rational intelligence and with the passions or feelings". Hence, body and mind are engaged at the same time, and the pairs reason and passion, intelligence and feeling, are employed jointly. From our perspective, teachers and educators make use of such pairs, or activate them, when developing their practices. This has been done ever since the profession started, but the affective labor has been increasingly required of these professionals once capitalist views of education have been striving to influence or determine the educational systems, particularly the private one in Brazil.

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Hardt devised a relation among immaterial jobs, informatization, and affective labor back in 1999 and reaffirmed it in 2007. These immaterial services, besides requiring knowledge of the discipline/subject, also require care and affect for the public or the client it serves. Due to the pandemic, teachers can mostly or only accomplish their professional tasks by relying on computers, the internet, educational platforms, and communication apps. Therefore, familiarity and gift for computer technology have become skills teachers cannot do without.

Hardt (1999, 2007) mentions how the affective labor forces the researcher to focus on primary divides, that is, between mind and body, and between reason and the passions. He also states it provides a new ontology of the human, which has direct implications for politics. Discussing affective labor and biopower, Hardt (1999, 2007) contradicts Foucault's idea when he says that feminist studies push into recognizing biopower from below instead of recognizing it from above. The feminist perspective brings to light the voices and stories of those who were invisible and who can make moves towards having their demands acknowledged, their voices heard. We will not deepen our discussion regarding this side of Hardt's proposal, but we assume that, at least on the micro political level, teachers, educators, and students could take a similar stand.

We now turn to how discourse helps us track, in the participants' contributions, instances that will identify the influence the socio-historical context exerts on mind-body/reason-passion on the macro level, and how we act discursively in the micro level to build affective scaffoldings, to support each other, and think about the quality of life and the possible, if any, micropolitical action.

3.4 Affect, language, and narratives

Authors such as Miller (2013), Golombek and Doran (2014), Moraes Bezerra, (2015) address the relation between affect and pre-service language teaching professional development. We acknowledge this relationship and extend it to the reality of in-service language teachers. However, it is just the professional perspective that is part of a broader perspective, that is, life stories , which can be accessed through discourse during interactions partly in the narratives we construct to cater for our interactional aims.

Ochs (1988), Ochs and Schiefllin (1989), Besnier (1990) are among the authors that discuss the link between language and affect. Ochs (1988) starts reviewing how infants are able to attend to, recognize and act on displays of emotion made by others. In the socialization process, Ochs (ibid.) proposes, these

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children learn what they should feel and how they should display their emotions in particular situations. These frames base the development of attitudes, opinions, values, and beliefs over a lifetime, which shows that affect is part of cognition. Ochs (1988, p. 170) adds that research in adult processing "indicate the essential role of affect in communication", and that the "speaker's affective dispositions are expressed through syntactic, morphological, and phonological structures". The author lists features in the English language that may convey affect disposition such as: verb voice, word order, sentential mood, right and left dislocation, tense/ aspect, deictics and other determiners, quantifiers, focus particles, affect particles and evidentials, phonological simplification/reduplication, phonological variation. Ochs (ibid.) claimed that "all sentences expressed in context have an affective component" as she analyzed narratives that she called 'personal narratives' due to the use of affect features.

Moreover, Bruner (1991, p.4) affirmed that "we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative - stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing and so on". Georgakopoulou (1997, p.1) commented on the importance of narratives to the "(re)constitution and interpretation of personal, social, and cultural reality". Linde (2015, p.1) acknowledged the use of narratives as a way "an individual or a group represents a version of the past in the present, often for the purpose of shaping a desired future". These ways of viewing the role of narratives are central to our study as they shed light on the narrative movement made by the CoEP participants.

In Labov and Waletzky's (1967) and Labov's (1972) study on naturally generated narratives, they provided some elements for the analysis of narratives. However, they were criticized for taking these narratives as representations of actual events and not as interpretive stances of the lived experience. As Georgakopoulou (1997, p.4) affirms, taking a constructionist standpoint, narratives are "selective (re)playings and (re)constructions [...] They are produced as part of social interactions in specific situations and for specific purposes". Hence, narratives are constructed in the interactional flow influenced by the co-presence of other participants. Labov's studies stated that stories must have a point and be worth telling, that is, an important quality is their reportability. Labov provides a useful structure for narrative analysis, but to the scope of our study, 'evaluation' is the one we will focus on. As Linde (1993, p. 72) stated "the linguistic forms that express evaluative structure cannot be specified simply, since evaluation can be indicated by a wide range of linguistic structures and linguistic choices". There are linguistic elements that perform evaluative functions such as: evaluative sentences,

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evaluative resources (use of indirect or direct speech, mention what people did instead of what they said, for instance), evaluative elements of a grammatical order (intensifiers, comparison, adjectives, appositive, etc.).

Having presented the theoretical background, we now turn to presenting more details about the study.

4 Our study

Exploratory Practice is a form of practitioner research, which encourages practitioners to work to understand their local practices, their quality of life. As members of both groups, we work affectively and cognitively to generate understandings on what affects the participants in our meeting. Thus, this study lies on the theoretical and ethical methodological principles of Exploratory Practice (ALLWRIGHT, 1991, 2003) in that it brings, in its essence, the urge to develop understandings concerning the groups' emotions and coping strategies to deal with social isolation and all the fear and uncertainties related to the Covid-19 pandemic the world has been going through since March 2020.

The data have been generated during a virtual EP meeting over the Zoom platform. The meeting, which lasted one hour and fifty-five minutes, gathered members from PUC-Rio, and FFP/UERJ. There were eleven participants in this meeting: two professors from PUC-Rio, three professors from FFP/UERJ, four postgraduate students, one undergraduate student and one English teacher (middle and high school). The Exploratory Practice groups (from PUC-Rio and FFP/UERJ) have always had monthly meetings, which have been held separately, mainly because of the distance between the two institutions. However, both groups follow a sort of similar agenda, which consists of text discussions, event preparations and group discussion of classroom situations or puzzles that arise during the meeting. Since EP is inclusive, the groups are not closed. Besides the core members, students and members of educational settings are welcome to participate if they express their interest in EP. When the pandemic started in March 2020, the presence meetings were canceled, and it took us two months to get acquainted with the 'new' way of interaction: the virtual platforms. Both institutions share WhatsApp groups through which contact is kept. Thus, based on the emotions present in the posts and the urge to interact and develop understandings regarding their lives during the pandemic, the EP members decided to restart having meetings, through the virtual platform Zoom. The analyzed meeting was the first one since the pandemic started. Hence, the

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meeting was scheduled with the purpose of providing a moment of catharsis in which the practitioners could share, hear, and release some of their anguishes, fears and anxieties related to the pandemic context. The group decided to record the meeting so that the other members who were not present could become acquainted with the issues that emerged along the interaction.

The selected excerpts contain pieces of interactions from that EP meeting out of which moments of affective scaffolding emerged through narratives and statements. Besnier (1990) defined affect as a "multichannel phenomenon" which "floods linguistic form on many different levels of structure in many different ways" (p. 421). Affect related words constitute the most salient lexicon domain in which affect prevails (BESNIER, 1990; BRUNER, 1991; OCHS & SCHIEFLIN, 1989; GEORGAKOPOULOU, 1997). Therefore, the participants' word choices and narratives regarding emotions and emotional comfort, as well as the material and social resources used to provide affective scaffolding were analyzed. Hence, our intention was to understand the way the community members expressed their emotions and how the members of the group provided support and affective scaffolding through discourse. We sought to observe and analyze what discursive strategies have been used to offer support in the distance and influence on the quality of life through this niche, which was the EP meeting.

In short, we seek to understand:

a) Which affects/emotions were expressed in the meeting?

b) Why is the Exploratory Practice meeting a niche for affective scaffolding?

c) How was affective scaffolding provided through discourse during the meeting?

The participants of the meeting agreed on our use of the excerpts and narratives for the study and chose pseudonyms to preserve their identity.

5 Data analysis and discussion

Since the meeting took place during the Covid-19 pandemic socio-historical context, the participants were emotionally affected. Although there is usually an article, a book, or a text to provide grounds for reflection and discussion, the meetings' flow normally follows its own pace, like a tapestry weaved by many hands. For this meeting, the assigned text was Boaventura Sousa Santos' *A cruel pedagogia do virus* (*The Cruel Pedagogy of the Virus*, 2020) and the exploratory conversation weaved by the participants had some explicit and some implicit references to it. Several issues came up, and they were grouped under four salient

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topics: longing, dreams, fear and micropolitics. The interaction was originally produced in Portuguese, but, for data analysis, we use transcripts of some fragments translated into English.

5.1 Longing (saudade, in Portuguese)

The first topic that emerged in our meeting is related to 'saudade da escola' - or a longing to be back to school. Thaís, a master student, presently in charge of a young cousin's school life, narrates how she got surprised as she read on his cellphone some messages exchanged by the kids in his class. They mentioned that "they are missing school". She evaluates this attitude and uses the intensifier 'really': "I found it really strange a pupil wishes to be at school because he is missing it". Thaís remembers her cousin's experience and uses it to reflect on her own feelings during the pandemic, considering that affect is related to the cultural and historical setting: "I think that, as human beings, we are missing physical contact". Thaís' statement is related to what we will name as a 'Brazilian affective culture of embracing' for this is a common gesture or way of expressing friendship, showing 'being there for you', either when we are with people we like during good times or when we want to show support in situations just like the one we have been through since March 2020.

Flávia, a professor and an English teacher at the public educational system in Rio de Janeiro, shares Thaís' view and narrates her experience with her pupils using this affective niche provided by the meeting to put forth her concerns about them. She said:

> They miss everything, right, they miss their life with routine, they miss school a lot. [...] they send messages to their friends through Google classroom and they all say they miss the social interaction they had with us, with their friends and even with the physical space since many of them live in favelas and their school is the place where they can run, play sports [...] because in their everyday life they get locked at home because their mothers must leave for work and they can't stroll around because it is dangerous, they can be a victim of a stray bullet.

This teacher's concern about her students goes beyond their cognitive development. It is also linked to their physical survival in a violent neighborhood. We observe the mind-body relationship as far as affect is concerned, totally influenced by the socio-historical setting. The repetition of 'miss' is an evaluative

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device (LABOV, 1972) on the students' quality of life both at home and at the virtual classroom. In her narrative, 'school' is the place of happiness, safety while their communities or *favelas* are the place of worries and violence.

Later, Thaís brings the idea of imprisonment because she has been studying how jail is represented in films and TV series:

> (...) being in jail affects not only the body but also the mind [...] those people were there because they committed a crime. Now everybody must stay home, now it is like everybody is in jail. I think, at least to me, it made me think about this thing of jail because I'm at home, I can't go out, I have to be here but I have to be productive but without being over productive [...] I can't set a lot of goals a day or else I'll freak out.

She compares the need to stay home during the pandemic to being in jail, which affects her mental health. She uses two words related to a capitalist ethos: 'productive' and 'goals'. Thais is living a situation that requires of her to produce since she holds a scholarship, and she must set goals not to fall behind her research schedule. However, if she insists on overproducing during the pandemic, that will lead her to mental imbalance. She is living in an ambiguous situation and the fragment of her discourse can be seen as an evaluation of her current situation, how poor her quality of life is. Thais uses a song as a resource to produce an affective scaffolding for the others and probably for herself:

> I couldn't paralyze and then, a song that I had posted for you, is the opening song of 'Orange is the new black' a TV series about prison, right, and in the lyrics what I like most is this thing of remembering faces on the street, right, remember people's voices. It must be this thing, after this online period everything is going to be different in the second chance then the chorus repeats 300 million times, we have time in this second, in our second chance that humanity will have after the pandemic, everything is going to be different like this will be different, right, this will affect us.

The song Thaís uses is a material resource. Through the song, she sends a positive message: the pandemic will be a learning opportunity for humanity to set new values, ones that may transform the way human beings deal with other human beings and their differences. We view this fragment as a sort of narrative through which Thaís somehow tries to shape a new future.

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5.2 About digital exclusion and dreams

Our reliance on digital equipment and applications to work and study, to be in contact with the world exposed the giant digital exclusion of many Brazilians. Esperança, a professor, addressed this issue narrating a sad moment in her professional life when she tried to help a student keep up with the content:

> This morning, I used all the morning trying to help a student from a school keep up with the subject. He was feeling like giving up because he couldn't handle it, and I offered to use part of my morning to help him keep up with the other students. (...) He said, "teacher, I can´t understand anything because I lose internet connection on my cell phone, and I depend on my neighbor's signal (...)" This awareness of thinking about ways to reach those who can't hear us or don't have the chance to share, not only us, but all the people who seek a better world, with better people. It has been my daily thought: what can I do, what can we do to help the ones who don't have any access to any kind of information?" [...] I think capitalism, the way it is organized, is not egalitarian, is not organized so that everybody has the same living conditions. It presupposes that there are people who will be left behind. And if we stop, I am not for this, I'm just pointing it [...] because we can't stop, we have to go on doing what we do [...] with hope and unfortunately there will be those who will be left behind. We have to protest, to fight so that they have access to what we do.

Her narrative reveals her anguish for not being able to fully help the student. She uses direct speech to bring the force of the student's voice and his suffering as he tries to study - a constitutional right. The affective labor entangled in the teaching process is a burden as she must deal with inequalities. This burden can lead to burnout as teachers face situations they cannot handle or transform. This feeling of fragility can become a step to mobilizing other professionals to act for equality in this micropolitical level and this is marked by the verbs: 'protest', 'fight', 'access'. Also related to micropolitics, in the sense of placing education against exploration of human beings and exclusion, is the repetition of parallel constructions - what can we do [teachers]; it is not egalitarian/it is not organized [capitalism]. This is also present when Esperança repeats the verb 'stop' accompanied by a negative particle expressing this ongoing process many teachers especially from the public sector are involved in fighting to guarantee students' access to knowledge, culture and critical reflection.

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Lily, a public school principal, shared her dream with the group: "(...) it is a dream, it is my dream, it's an utopia that when returning from this pandemic (...) that each one received a computer. Isn't it perfect? (...)" This excerpt can be seen as an affective scaffolding, as an attempt to devise a more inclusive future in what access to technology is concerned.

5.3 Fear

As the meeting went by, Lily mentioned the situation of a student from her school who complained about the huge amount of homework they had been assigned on the digital platform the school members were using for remote classes. This action aroused different reactions among the school community, and some teachers got upset and threatened due to a disrespectful comment made by one student that exposed all the teachers and had them fear the negative evaluation of workmates, students, and students' family members. Lily had the chance to talk to this student about it as it can be seen in this fragment of her narrative:

> (...) I emphasized with her that it has to be done in a loving way, it means talking to the teacher nicely, because the teacher is also having a hard time to post the activities on the platform (...)

After Lily's talk, Cassio mentioned the importance of the EP meeting as a niche in which reflection happens:

> I say that this meeting here is very enriching to me because it makes me reflect as a student. Lily said something that made me think, because I study at a private university, I am having remote classes too, so it changed my view of how I talk to my professors (...) how I should address this professor, so this meeting is being very good to me.

Lily's talk provided Cassio with affective scaffolding, since she mentioned a point to which he related to, as a college student. Thus, her comment brought him a different perspective about the teacher-student relationship. When he referred to the meeting, he used the positive adjectives "enriching" and "good", both preceded by the intensifier "very", which demonstrates evaluation and Cassio's trust regarding the Exploratory community and the meeting's scaffolding ethos itself.

Sara returns to Lily's topic to address an issue she considers disturbing which is the fear students feel when talking to teachers:

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> What you said is interesting, Lily, because it is a little of that interactional thing that we have already discussed. Some of you have studied interaction during the master's, college, you expressed yourself well, because it raises the question of who is being addressed, right? And then, you offend or please everybody, and finally you don't know what you are doing, and you do something complicated if you address the teacher specifically, it is also threatening. I have heard several students from PUC, something very good that is happening there is the rounds of conversation, better than the classes (...) here in our Exploratory Practice we have already overcome this, but I want to mention that many students, even in the first week, said they really don't have the guts, they are afraid. It was the most used word in the conversation, fear of expressing themselves to the teacher. (...)

In this excerpt, Sara shares her understandings about the girl's not addressing one specific teacher when she complained about the amount of homework the students were assigned with. Sara brought up the "fear" question when she said, "it is also threatening". Thus, she acknowledges students are afraid of talking to teachers, based on the rounds of conversation she had with her students from PUC. However, she mentions EP meetings as niches in which students and teachers share the same reflective space, when she says: "we have already overcome this", which echoes the EP principle of involving everybody in the work for understanding. Sara proceeds:

> I think it is very interesting to consider the influence in the way we talk to and address a group or a person, because I don't know if this fear is just now, in the pandemic. This is what is sad, I think this student would feel the same fear in face-to-face learning, and this is the scariest thing, this fear (...)

Sara feels scaffolded by Lily's narrative about the girl and the message on the board and starts reflecting on whether this "fear" only exists in the pandemic context, or if it is also present in face-to-face interactions, which might be the case, in her opinion.

Another concern that emerged was the fear of getting sick or dying because of Covid-19. In Lily's words:

> (...) the situation is already serious, since we are worried about who will be the next to die, whose death will be the next I will hear of, because it seems that there is an acquaintance dying every day

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> (...) then we must have a tranquil mind and try to keep our sanity so as not to be part of this hate, which is installed out there, as professionals and population. I think we need a lot of sanity, try to keep it, and this is what our meetings are for, right?

Lily expresses her fear of bad news, of hearing about the death of someone she knows. Although she is worried, she manages to provide herself and the group with affective scaffolding, when she brings the ideas of tranquility and sanity into her discourse. Her lexical choices "must have", "try to keep", "we need" reinforce her scaffolding intention, which is also the purpose of the meeting, in her point of view, as she said: "(...) and this is what our meetings are for, right?". The confirmation question "right" invites the community to reflect on the purpose she saw in that meeting, which was to amplify the participants' chance of surviving the pandemic stress and fear. According to Sterelny (2010) the mind is scaffolded by the niche, which is engineered in ways to increase the beings' chance of survival. Therefore, the meeting was engineered by the CoEP to provide the emotional comfort the group needed at that moment of fear and social isolation.

Then, Thais comments: "It is difficult, isn't it? Because when we can do it a little, something happens, right?" She goes on by reporting several cases of Covid-19 she has heard of in her neighborhood, deaths, and even the heart attack she had. In the following excerpt, Thais suggests topics for other subsequent Exploratory meetings:

> (...) There is no way to keep this positive mindset for a little or a long time. I don't know how people can do it, but I am trying to keep positive here with my mind, I am still waiting. We could talk about this issue of emotional health in our next meeting, mental health in this situation, these things we are experiencing now for the future, right? After all the things we have been going through, as teachers, right? (...) When we go back to 'normal' we will see a lot of things, not only mental but also emotional, from students who will come to us and say "Oh my father died", so it could be the topic for the next meeting (...)

Thais expresses her difficulties to keep positive despite all the bad news and the fear around her. She seeks quality of life when she says, "but I am trying", and then she begins the affective scaffolding movement when, based on the trust she holds in the EP niche, she suggests topics for our meetings which would address "emotional" and "mental" health. We can perceive Thaís is afraid of the 'return to

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normal". She fears how she and the students will be. Therefore, she feels that having meetings to discuss this issue would provide the community with the necessary affective scaffolding to handle the uncertain and threatening future situation.

After hearing Lily and Thais, Amadeus provided us with affective scaffolding by quoting the voice of a friend, who is a teacher, as a social resource (STERELNY, 2010) in his narrative:

> (...) So, she has seventeen classes, she talked about the difficulties, but she said the following: "I do all this for love (...) and this is all that will stay when we return, this hope we have, because not everything is a disgrace, there are a lot of people being cured, right?" We must be prepared. (...) absorb other issues which boost our self-esteem so that we see the light at the end of the tunnel. It is bad, but it is good. I don't know if I made myself understood.

In this excerpt of his narrative, Amadeus brought his friend's voice (GEORGAKOPOLOU, 1997) through direct speech as a resource to shed light on the fear of returning. He used positive affective lexical choices in his scaffolding narrative: 'love', 'self-esteem' and 'light'. It is like shaping a desired future (ibid.). Leo agrees with Amadeus, and refers to one of the principles of Exploratory Practice:

> Not only do I agree with you, Amadeus, but also this matter of love goes through, in my opinion, one of the principles of EP which is integration, right? The union among everybody involved (...)

Leo's talk reinforces the affective scaffolding nature of the Exploratory Practice ethos when he bridges "love" and "union", relating them to the Exploratory principle of involving everybody in the work for understanding, having 'quality of life' as a central pursuit.

5.4 A possible move towards affect and micropolitics

In 5.2, we analyzed Esperança's anguish for not being able to help the digitally excluded student. She insists on the issue and proposes the following puzzles "How can we contribute so that fewer students are left behind? Why should we move so fast if there are so many students who move so slowly?" She adds a very short narrative, "you know, try to reach other students, our meeting, I got very happy on the day Lily brought her students to our meeting and I'd like to be able to bring other people to listen to you". She uses the adjective "happy", and the intensifier 'very', not only to express her feeling, but also as an evaluative device.

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It shows how she shares EP's constant move to involve practitioners in discussions in which they can contribute with reflections promoting mutual development.

Above all, we analyze Esperança's discourse as a move to consider EP's societal role on improving living conditions or, at least, on this micropolitical level, on having the practitioners be a source of transformation by touching other people. Maybe she aims to involve others who will develop a critical standpoint based on critically reflecting about the lives they are currently living, about other people's quality of life. Leo aligns his contribution to hers by gearing the focus of the exploratory conversation to social movements that have been changing the euro centered , patriarchal scenery in a decolonial stance.

> The first step, I believe, right, if we bring the issue into scrutiny, reflect about it and I believe that this is what made it possible for some things to happen. For instance, women and black people now have rights that were denied, not only to women, but also to blacks long ago. Nowadays, imagine one hundred, two hundred years ago or yesterday, women and blacks didn't have access to many things they have nowadays. Most of the things they have access to today. I believe that all these conquests pass through moments like these. [...] I also believe that the moment we do what we do here with EP, and in other groups as well, bring the issue to protest, look for, act to have the right things done, I think, is the first step to making these become actions. We bring the issue and the actions may come later.

Leo mentions EP practitioner's actions of involving people to reflect as the starting point to transformation, possibly a more profound one because it is based on collectively produced and shared understandings. As Allwright has argued since 1991, EP is not against change since it is part of life, but change must be supported by deep thinking, sound understandings. By doing so, practitioners are capable of independent decision making and are responsible for their choices which have micropolitical and micro-level consequences. This means encouraging autonomy in the Freirean sense (1999).

Babe, one of the senior members of the CoEP, somehow emphasizes this idea as she affirms :

> I think these actions we do to integrate everybody, a desire we have, and I think it is part of EP principles, it's something we all do a lot, right, that is to integrate, isn't it? We always think of integration, of participating in this group, in other groups, I think that is the path or else we should hold guns and go revolutionarily. Maybe we don't

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have this destiny, but in the end, it is a matter of using your weapons (as a teacher) and start acting, help the kid. And that is a lot.

Integration is one of the key words of EP, not only regarding pedagogical practices that integrate teaching-learning-reflection-research in the classroom. As Babe says, it is a sort of attitude, a matter of integrating with other people, other groups, letting different positions be shared, analyzed, respected, aiming at having space for all sorts of differences and caring for human beings.

6 Conclusion

Working with Exploratory Practice goes beyond fostering academic autonomy, being a step to liberatory autonomy, as proposed by Kumaravadivelu (2003), to promote critical thinking by offering learners intellectual tools to recognize and overcome sociopolitical constraints. Moreover, despite acknowledging it might not be an easy task to deal with affect , the affective tools will be necessary to build more positive human relationships, to mitigate suffering and positively affect the quality of everybody's life.

This study has focused on the affects, scaffoldings, reflections and many more issues brought to the interactional setting of our affective niche - the meeting. Due to all the suffering inflicted by the Covid-19 pandemic on the participants, the discourse produced in the interaction presented a mix of negative emotions, such as 'fear', 'anguish', 'anxiety', 'anger' and 'longing' as well as positive ones like 'love', 'hope' and 'encouragement'. Therefore, the analyzed interactive discourse showed that the meeting constitutes a niche in which affective scaffolding is built since every time a member expressed a negative emotion about the present situation, his/her practice and the uncertainties about the future, another member provided affective scaffolding by sharing a life story, for instance, to offer some emotional comfort to the member in low spirits.

We observed occurrences of self and social scaffolding, permeated by material and social resources. As an example of self-scaffolding, Thais expressed her fear of dying of Covid-19 or not being able to deal with all the distress caused by the pandemic, but she herself started the scaffolding movement when she suggested addressing the issue of "emotional and mental health" in another EP meeting. Social resources have been used during the meeting through the insertion of other people's voices, as in Amadeus' friend's example and Esperança's student who had to borrow the neighbor's internet to attend online classes.

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Regarding material resources, the participants made use of songs, a text by Boaventura Souza Santos and a TV series, for instance.

This study has generated theoretical as well as practical implications, since it was the first time an Exploratory meeting was analyzed. As members, we have been participating in EP meetings for years, and we have always perceived the affective scaffolding nature of both study/research groups' interactions, since the theoretical as well as pedagogical questions discussed in the meetings have generally been combined and linked with human/affective questions, be them through puzzles or other affective issue that arose during the meetings. Thus, the analysis enabled us to understand that the Exploratory meeting constitutes a niche which favors affective scaffolding due to its affective ethos of a trustworthy, non-judgemental locus in which the EP members or temporary participants may feel comfortable to express their emotions, reflect about them, provide, and be provided with affective scaffolding.

The Exploratory meeting mirrors EP principles. Along the interaction we can perceive the prioritization of quality of life as all the participants worked together to develop mutually and understand life during the pandemic. Thus, theoretically, the understandings generated by this analysis suggest the expansion of Exploratory Practice's fourth principle to "Work to bring people together and provide affective scaffolding".

This article echoes EP ethos in that it encourages practitioners to look carefully at their own pedagogical and professional practices to construct intelligibility on their actions, on their words and how they impact our quality of life. The analysis of the interaction made of narratives as well as other linguistic devices allowed us not only to understand the *modus vivendi* of the group regarding the construction of affective bonds among participants – be them senior or newcomers – but also to see the meeting as an experience of critical education in the Freirean sense. This is especially true if we relate the understandings generated through the analysis to Freire's words ([1974]2005, p.33) in the following quotation: "Education is an act of love, and thus an act of courage. It cannot fear the analysis of reality or, under the pain of revealing itself as a farce, avoid creative discussion". Therefore, in the realm of Applied Linguistics, this study contributes to shed some light on how, on the micropolitical level, issues of affect and emotion may engage language users in micro actions for transformation of the social reality.

Finally, the discourses produced by the CoEP regarding fear and exclusion, for instance, confirmed that the pandemic intensified problems and sufferings that have been affecting many people for decades. However, as the analysis showed,

we can survive, we can count on our colleagues' support, and we can go on fighting for social justice, teaching for social justice and dreaming of better days.

Author's contributions

Este artigo foi escrito por Isabel Cristina Rangel Moraes Bezerra (UERJ) e Fernanda Vieira da Rocha Silveira (UERJ) de forma conjunta e colaborativa. A introdução foi redigida pelas duas autoras; a seção "Exploratory Practice and its ethos" foi escrita por Isabel Cristina Rangel Moraes Bezerra; a seção "Affect and emotions", por Fernanda Vieira da Rocha Silveira, assim como as subseções "Affective scaffolding" e "Niche Construction and the Exploratory Affective Scaffolding". As subseções "The affective turn and affective labor" e "Affect, language, and narratives" foram redigidas por Isabel Cristina Rangel Moraes Bezerra.

Salientamos que as seções e subseções supracitadas foram revisadas pelas duas autoras. As partes referentes à metodologia, análise e discussão dos dados, conclusão e referências foram escritas pelas duas autoras de forma colaborativa. O resumo e o *abstract* foram escritos pelas duas autoras.

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