The consolidation of learning groups in the continuing education project

A consolidação de grupos de aprendizagem em projeto de formação continuada

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Abstract

This paper reports and discusses the importance and the consolidation of a study group composed by basic education teachers and academics in a collaborative proposal. Based on enunciated produced by teachers and records obtained from participation in collective meetings, this paper highlights the existence of reflexive advances of teachers and students'

difficulty to deal with barriers faced by teachers in their formative experience. This analysis is based on bakhtinian perspective on the enunciated, which involves social interaction as a way to understand the episodes cited in this paper. It concludes emphasizing the importance of consolidation of the group to the construction of reflective ways for academics and teacher and seeking a clarification of understanding of collaborative research.

Keywords: Learning groups. Collaborative research. Bakhtin.

Resumo

Este artigo relata e discute a importância e a consolidação de um grupo de estudos for-mado por professores da Educação Básica e acadêmicos em uma proposta de trabalho colaborativo. Partindo de enunciados produzidos pelos próprios professores e de registros obtidos com a participação em reuniões coletivas, o texto destaca a existência dos avanços reflexivos dos docentes e a dificuldade dos acadêmicos em lidar com entraves vividos pelos professores na experiência formativa. Essa análise baseia-se na perspectiva bakhtiniana acerca do enunciado, que pressupõe a interação social como forma de compreender os episódios citados neste trabalho. Conclui enfatizando a importância da consolidação do grupo para a construção de caminhos reflexivos da parte dos acadêmicos e professores e buscando um esclarecimento da compreensão de uma pesquisa colaborativa.

Palavras-chave: *Grupos de aprendizagem. Pesquisa colaborativa. Bakhtin.*

Introduction

There are not few academic papers that present the result of the collaborative researches. In general, the articles and books published

about this theme show us the privileged way of training in the process (MIZUKAMI et al., 2002) or provide a more theorized reflection concerning the conceptions of the collaborative research and team works (CLARK et al., 1996; WASSER; BRESLER, 1996). In general, these papers clearly show the great "theoretical" benefit for researchers and "the reflective" benefit for teachers.

Such researches represent a general abundant material about teacher education, because they signalize positive views of work which are beyond the technical instrumentation, so fashionable in a recent past from the teaching training purposes (so criticized by several authors as: KINCHENLOE, 1997; MIZUKAMI et al.; 2002; PIMENTA, 2000; SCHÖN, 1987, 1992, 1998). In this way, they go further in the critical and reflexive approach in the teachers development training.

This article is in this universe of work, being for the collaborative practical and it intends to present part of the experiences in a collaborative practice. It is wanted to emphasize dialogues and texts of a group of teachers who participated of a project of continuing education, analyzing them according to the manifestation of the dialogues of the existing language in the group moments. Although the raising numbers of articles legitimizing the collaborative research, it seems that just some of them are under the analysis from the language perspective. In general, it is intended to think about the potential of the consolidation from teachers and academic groups in the school. The analysis will be presented from texts taken from the field diary of the participating observer and also from reports written by participating teachers of the formative proposal, as told before.

The importance of this perspective is in its clear design according to the group occurrences when the university and the school meet and make their speeches and positions about that experience. This option also reflects in our conception of teaching training, because it is believed that the teacher's social group is a leader of its "own culture" (PIMENTA;

GARRIDO; MOURA, 2001), which share values, beliefs, goals, wishes, symbols of the professional practice. Exposing fragments of those signs, strengthening and presenting the diversity and the intensity of these experiences the article is based in the enhancement of the teaching practice as a responsible, evolving and important social practice.

The group we refer in this paper was in the project called Ribeirão Anhumas in the School[1], a proposal which assumed for the continued education, the partnership between the public school and the university, characterizing what we called as collaborative research. Our participation in this group of teachers was done from their weekly meetings, when we tried to help the teachers in the bureaucratic, theoretical and practical issues of the project, trying to concatenate needs and doubts of the teachers and needs and doubts of the university team. It is important to be clear about our role, as members of the university, it was not to evaluate the teachers or supervise their meetings, but follow their reflections of understanding the way they mobilized their actions and skills, in order to achieve the practice of the proposals created in groups in their own classrooms.

The first year of the project was marked by dynamic actions to the teaching training teachers group from two schools (E.E. Professora Ana Rita Godinho Posa and E.E. Adalberto Nascimento)[2], consisting in

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[1] The project is called "Construction of school and curricular knowledge related to science, society and environment in the elementary school with emphasis on the regionalization from the results of the Public Policies Project" (Process FAPESP 2006/01558-1) and it was coordinated by Prof. Dr. Maurício Compiani, from Geosciences Applied to Education Department, Geosciences Institute of Unicamp, in partnership with the Biology Institute of Unicamp, Agronomy Institute of Campinas and the schools E.E. Adalberto Nascimento and E.E. Professora Ana Rita Godinho Pousa. The project is supported by financial assistance from FAPESP and CNPq and sponsored by Petrobrás Ambiental, with planned activities for four years (2007 to 2010). It is important to highlight that this project represents the continuation of another project related to pubic policies, where sought to develop a socio-environmental diagnosis of the Ribeirão das Anhumas basin, in Campinas.

[2] Although the continuing education period has involved both schools, the following reporting in this article only regards to the school Professora Ana Rita Godinho Pousa.

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workshops about main themes and subjects; by studying and planning meetings, characterized by preparing moments and assessment of the activities, discussions and deepening about some themes, looking for a critical and reflexive view about the socio-environmental issues, especially those which refer to the Ribeirão Anhumas basin, allowing actions and interventions in the place. The activities and the pedagogical workshops resulted in 328 hours of work. The second year was more practical and well defined, in some way, in the school. In this moment, the teachers worked in teaching and research projects which would be done in the following year. In this phase there were some teaching practice constructions by the teachers and their groups in order to start the actions of the project. The third year was a moment marked by intense activity, once the teachers introduced themes and practices which were prepared in the previous year. In that year, teachers collected a big amount of data in reports, activities and fieldwork. We bring here fragments of such process.

The collaborative research in the teacher education

The collaborative research in this article can be characterized as that one which happens together and to the school and teachers. It is different from the conception of research that is in favor of articles about the school and the teachers. Then, we agree to Pimenta, Garrido e Moura (2001) when they characterize the continuing education project developed by them, which purpose was

> to promote the professional development of teachers and researchers, to encourage changes in the organizational culture of the school partner, to improve knowledge about the pedagogical construction process by the scholar team and to offer subsidies to the public policies in service-training (GARRIDO; PIMENTA; MOURA, 2000, p. 94-95).

In addition to these goals, we add the interest of the researchers in the learning process developed by teachers in the continuing education. This kind of work presupposes important facts according to the educational view. One of them regards the recognition that

> [...] information, courses, techniques, but by learning and practicing, individual and in group, from the critical reflection about the practices and work contexts, creating opportunities to rebuild the professional and the personal (GIOVANI, 1998, p. 2).

The collaborative research is, therefore, an opportunity to break away with this technical bias in the teacher education, by supporting reflexive and shared work. Clark et al. (1996) and Mizukami (2003) emphasize that it seems not to have a consensus to what collaborative research means, so they bring different authors to discuss it. However, this previous author says it is possible to identify a characteristic which permeates the collaborative comprehensions and the collaborative researches, which is "the potentiality to improve the professional development through the opportunities to the reflection about the practice, shared criticism e supported changes" (MIZUKAMI, 2003, p. 209), this conception also goes by authors brought by Clark et al. in his article, who point out something very interesting: although the similar meanings among all definitions of collaborative research, the potential professional development of those relations seems to be something unilateral.

In fact, this is an important dimension of the collaborative research that needs to be considered. To what extent are the changes welcome to the teachers? And how can we evaluate such magnitude? And how are these changes in the researchers' practices? Perhaps this article cannot handle all these questions, but it intends to move forward on possibilities to some of these reflections.

In general, the collaborative proposals tend to get closer to a perspective focused in real problems experienced in the scholarly atmosphere, trying to denaturalize the assumption that the teaching process is an easy task. In this direction, if to the schools this perspective seems to be conceivable for the teachers work, in the academic reality institutions it isn't so natural like that. "The research work developed with collaboration with teachers and other professionals of the school is not considered all the time, in the university, as a work with academic and scientific legitimacy." (GIOVANI, 1998).

By breaking with a technical teachers education conception, the collaborative research recognizes the teacher as a subject in knowledge and in teaching and the roles of the different members are something in a permanent process of construction, through the constant dialogue aiming, for last, the professional academic and elementary teachers development.

> Although the subjects are constructed by their own knowledge and become them competent to develop the investigation, in interaction, the same subjects are knowledge builders and not only as users of this kind of knowledge and build new roles and possibilities among them (RODRIGUES; GARZÓN, 2006, p. 227-228).

Another fact which tends to agree to Clark et al. (1996) is the belief that the dialogue must be the central key in all changes. "We see this issue as a fundamental difference in collaboration – which is a sharing and mutual chances not in taking the same work research, but, mainly, in understanding each one's work" (CLARK et al., 1996, p. 196). They assume it as a subtle perspective, but also critical, because it is done to level the playing field in a way to permit teachers and researchers take, equally, the collaboration benefits.

Settled in this importance of dialoguing we propose to reflect on the dialogues comprehension in our following collaborative

research. As members of the university, we are interested in the reflection about the impact of such partnership in the teachers' professional construction: what happened in the weekly meetings and other spaces of socialization and what could we characterize as something relevant to the professional teacher practice and to the comprehension of the importance of the university in crucial issues to this professional development? This specific research problem allows the design of a good reflection on constructing the collaborative research in a continuing education proposal. It represents a small piece of our doubts and aspirations related to this practice, but it already implies signs to our comprehension in this kind of research.

The enunciations settings as an analysis perspective

How to analyze speeches and field diary notes fragments without falling into the trap of a possible "word transparency"? How to analyze enunciations, considering we are (us, from the university) a constituent part of the teachers group? How to transcend to a merely descriptive and evaluative analysis, originated from a "social place" that determines authority and knowledge, like the university? These issues will guide our explanation in favor of the analytic socio-historical perspective, which is an important reference to the analysis in Bakhtin's essays.

In this direction, the collected texts couldn't be equivalent to what the linguistic material brought as a clear and ready way. A methodological option that helped us overcoming the assumptions about the language was the comprehension of the texts of the teachers and academics as *enunciations*.

Bakhtin's concept of speech becomes relevant not only in the linguistic factors, but extraverbal elements, where is included the interlocutors and the context. Indeed, these elements are in extensive

fields which include a diversity of other factors, for example, to whom the speech is, how the interlocutors define the tasks, which context are the speeches changed, the comprehension of the speeches among the interlocutors, etc.

Bakhtin (2000, p. 318) is clear:

> The speech is a complex phenomenon, polymorphic, since we do not analyze it in an individual way, but in its relation to the author (the speaker) and as a link in the chain of communication, in its relation with other enunciations (a relation which is not used to search in the verbal plan, stylistic-compositional, but in the plan of the object of its meaning).

The enunciation is built from the verbal interaction, set in Marxism and Philosophy of Language as the true substance of language. And the verbal interaction is done through the enunciation. It is also in the enunciation, told as a social interaction, that is born the ideological content which is in our consciousness and it is responsible for the production of signs. The ideological character of the sign, the 'word' as said in this text, it is what modulates our analysis and what allows us to treat the word as an "ideological phenomenon by excellence" (BAKHTIN, 2004, p. 36).

Considering the word as an ideological product, we realize that it works

> [...] in any social situation (read it as ideological), it becomes an ideological sign because it accumulates the tones of the lively dialogues from interlocutors with the social values, concentrating in it the slow changes happened in the society basis, and, in the same time, pressuring a change in the social structures (STELLA, 2005, p.178).

The following analysis will have a better and clear reflection about the enunciation. It is intended to present the results from this consideration, according to its determined subject: multifaceted and

unfinished, who brings in his life story deep marks from his enunciation, and from others:

> The enunciation is full of echoes and memories of other enunciations, which is connected within a common sphere of the verbal communication. The enunciation must be considered as an answer to the previous enunciation into a sphere (the word 'answer' is used in the broad sense): refuting, confirming, completing, working, thinking and, in a way or another, counts on them (BAKHTIN, 2000, p. 316).

A constitutive element of all enunciation is the dialogic dimension, vital characteristic of the language and it can't be abstracted from, being a condition of its meaning, that is, although the several voices do not appear in its compositional structure, the enunciation is dialogic. The dialogism, besides being the fundamental notion of the Bakhtinian concept of language, it is the element which establishes the interdiscursive nature. It refers, therefore, to the constant dialogue, not always symmetrical and harmonious, among the several speeches that define enunciation and which are done in the social interactions and through them. Each speech, intentionally or not, interact with other previous or following speeches. It is not individual, on the contrary, it has an intertextual dimension which can be characterized by the presence of at least two interlocutors, two voices which construct this speech, or by the fact of keeping dialogic relations with other speeches in the enunciation.

To Bakhtin (2004, p. 127) the dialogue is conceived as a process that reaches further than just the interaction face-to-face, which is just one of the conditions where it happens, because it sets "the word 'dialogue' in a wide context, not just as a loud voice communication, like face-to-face people, but all verbal communication of any kind". We intend to show these voices and relations, through enunciation, using the following examples.

Interlocution as a component of the collaborative research: what do enunciations reveal?

The enunciations presented in this topic were taken from several sources documented in the Project, especially those which were developed in meetings, existing in the participant's[3] field diary who followed the group every week. They were also taken from teachers' reports or discussion forums through the Teleduc[4] tool. They are transcripted exactly the way they were taken from the sources and do not represent given answers in interviews from specific questions.

Characterizing this process as dialogic, it is important to bring not only the general production of the context of these enunciations (Ribeirão Anhumas in the School Project), but also to set the interlocutors. In the cases presented here, the texts were in a very heterogeneous universe by teachers from the public school, postgraduate and graduate students and teacher researchers from the university. In general, it is not possible to set specific contents for each fragment presented in this article, since the dialogues were in different supports: texts whose goals were to describe developed activities, reports which described and analyzed the implemented actions by teachers and academics, chats and forums conducted by mediators, etc.

The following fragments are part of the empirical system of our research and they will be revealed followed by the discussion promoted by the Bakhtinian reference.

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[3] The observer-participant had been with the teachers for around two years, the objective was to develop her conclusion paper and her undergraduate research program. For further information, see Cracel (2008).

[4] Teleduc is an environment created by Information Center Applied to Education of Unicamp and used to distance education.

I'm another person, so I can really see it, because I have experienced it, right? It has been forty nine years living in a certain way, with people who thought in that way. Suddenly in a year, I have changed... it wasn't just my thoughts, I changed my habits,
I have changed inside... I'm not the same anymore. So I think like this: if I'm not the same one, my students can't be either [...] *If I have changed myself, they also can* [...] (Math Teacher – field diary, March 18th 2008).

That's true, rethinking is what we do the most in our meetings and in our routine. The meetings we had about school projects shone different ideas in our mind. The practice is not the same (Portuguese Teacher – Discussion Forum *Reflections about the project,* September 18th 2007).

The first two enunciations represent the beginning of the context in the Anhumas project (year 2007 and early 2008). It is important to bring the reader to the context that, in this phase, the process depended much more on the implementation of the axes/classes and proposed activities by the trainers. The teachers were actively involved, they had dialogues in class, proposed and developed activities, however, it was not necessary the link between what was "learned" in the project and in the classroom. We were in a certain "calm" moment of our education process, where the reflections were just to the teacher's experience with the university. It represented the insertion of the teachers group to another group: the academics one and vice-versa. At this moment, it was not needed a deeper interlocution between the groups, because trainers led the workshops and teachers were the participants. Reflections, opinions, informal conversations were enough here and they could show the thematic and methodological settings of the teacher education by the trainers. It was clear several advantages of the collaborative process, since the enunciations came from the teachers of the project.

They are important, specially, by bringing the idea of the "transformation" experienced by the teachers. Speeches like: "*I have*

changed myself…" or "*The practices are not the same…*" point to directions which culminate in a broken traditional inertia to what teachers are usually labelled in this profession. Thus, they show the will in learning and the satisfaction of change recognized by teachers in the process. Deep marks in the relation between the teaching and the professional development process are noticed: in a society that considers the teacher as the "guilty" of those educational problems, we realize that the improvement or the reflections instigation is welcome in their experiences. It is noticed that the processes which legitimate the professional development of teachers respecting their differences are considered successful, welcome, even if it overburdens them.

> *The contact with the academia provided us moments of reflection, which before it, they were unnoticed, and it suggests a constant study. The need for studying put us in touch with pertinent subjects in our routine as teachers, besides it provided new knowledge* (Taken from the pedagogical project, 1st semester 2007, p.6).

Again, teachers show how important the contact with the university was. This time, they emphasized that academics showed them reflections which were unnoticed by them before. Far from the perception, how to produce your own practice and its changing with the problems/contents/experiences? The reflection about the action it is not a simple and automatic open door. It is intrinsically related to *mediation*. In this direction, Bakhtin and other authors who follow him, emphasize the importance of the "other" to develop the individual "me". We can understand, therefore, that "[…] the development in the thought plan is not from the individual to the socialized […], but, before it, from social to individual […]" (CLARK; HOLQUIST, 2004, p. 249). The produced collectivity helps in reflections constructions, provides perceptions and opens reflexive ways.

Working with the collective group is not an easy task, mainly when we don't have open spaces to discussions. The project allows us to have those spaces. I think we can handle with interdisciplinary moves, it is just a manner of time to everything becomes a reality in the school (Biology Teacher – Discussion Forum *Interdisciplinary*, April 17th 2007).

Such meetings (of studying and planning) brought a space and a time we didn't use to have to discuss our practice, theoretical studies, changing experiences and to the group collective, to show and improve our ideas and activities, etc. (Taken from the pedagogical project, 1st semester 2007, p. 5).

These last two enunciations bring the subject around the creation of meetings spaces for teachers**.** It represented an exigency coming from the coordination of the project with a clear goal that the activities creation and the continuing education were dependent of the collective teachers and the relation of them with the school purposes.

Although the difficulties to concatenate schedules to those meetings, they were viable, as the group acquired some "identity" with its configuration. *("There was a considerable strength and approximation of the group of participating teachers, becoming them more cohesive and actively with the weekly meetings"*; Pedagogical Project, 1st semester, 2007, p. 3). This identity can be also checked in the way some teachers refer to others, clarifying, again, the crucial importance of this "other" in the individual construction. *"The project provides us…"; "I think we can handle…"; "Such meetings brought a space and a time we didn't use to have to discuss…".* The reference to the other in the teachers' speeches shows how important is the configuration of an action which is wanted in group, also emphasizing the difficulty of this work in group.

Again, in this context, something important to highlight in the configuration of a collective identity is the creation of a "complicity" of the group to face the problems experienced by the teachers, as the secretariat impositions, direction, lack of time to study. Besides, the identity built in the collective reverberate in the work condition, as the collective group

has a greater "authority" to cause pressure in the organizational structure of the school to have discussions about the practices.

> *During the meeting… some reports from teachers. Teacher Patricia marked the difficulty she faces: just halted! The 3rd grade students do when they think they must do… Teacher Sara was deeper in the content and she has stopped the project work. She said she thinks the interdisciplinary is very difficult to work with* (Taken from the field diary – Study and Planning Meeting – August 12th 2008).

The inherent difficulty to any proposal which is not just repositioning or updating contents is produced deep cycles of intense complaining moments in the meetings.

Such attitudes, exemplified by only two teachers, also represented some difficulty to the university team; although the classroom task is not our job, the academy was, next to the teachers, some north to the experiences in the educational process. The "halting" feeling of the pedagogical work is uncomfortable and it must be understood in a wide way, not punctual. It seems to be positive the Project, its goals and schedules suffer some adjustments in their dynamic and composition, because it is a part of a human being activity e it depends on social interactions of teachers, institutions, administration, students, contents, university, development agencies, etc.

The university team participated of these moments trying to clarify the reasons which would have been an obstacle in the activities, suggesting collective work among the teachers, creating dynamic activities in order to systematize and understand the problems. It is important to say that the referrals were not the best options for those problems, but a just possibility, among others, to face them, since we did not have the answers to many questions.

Beyond these points, it is possible to note ways of understanding the project by teachers. When the teacher says "*was deeper in the content and she has stopped the project work*", we think about the teachers' (or some of them) representation about the Project. This enunciation opens

in a multiplicity of voices in the school universe in a point the contents demarcation is prevailing to any other proposal in the school. According to these lines, the project runs parallel and far from a devoted teaching action: transmission contents**.**

> *At 7.30 p.m. we started the meeting with all the teachers. We had a huge fight because of the "imposition" via coordination in dividing the groups and mix them with another school, during the mid-term conference. It was a bad situation for everybody, Fernanda refused it, explaining there was always a good way to this conversation, without imposition, therefore , if they wanted, they could create a new proposal for working and show it to the coordination* (Taken from the field diary - Study and Planning Meeting – July 8th 2008).

If the previous enunciations enhance the group and the interaction with the university to the design of professional advancement, the last fragment emphasizes how contentious the collaborative work is and how they interfere in the activities. Such situations happened some times and they emphasize the shared routine between two groups requires an open dialogue. Dialogue which presupposes contact, agreement and disagreement. Of course the conflict is not experienced in a comfortable way, because there is disagreement and discontent occurred in the process, but we must recognize that it provides an outsourcing from this conflict which indicates, in its phase, the maturity for dialoguing e new experiences.

Final considerations

The developed analysis enables a large set of discussion for formative processes whose goals are the collaborative research development. Wasser and Bresler (1996) highlight that for a long time in the in the qualitative and quantitative researches, there was the

"lonely" researcher image, that one who works alone. However, it was, gradually, demystified by the social theories development, which enhance the collective nature of knowledge. The authors say there are few articles published about the social role in the interpretative processes, as, an example, the relation between the researcher and the participants and among the participants themselves. Besides, the researches which have been found describe the process, but they don't analyze the education training of the work groups.

In agreement with the authors, the objective of this article was to reveal, in parts, the dynamic of weekly meetings among researchers and teachers and, through this revealing, show how a team work made up by diversity, which keeps two social groups together, was formed. It was intended to go forward, to show not only the benefits reached, but also part of the mishaps experienced in this dynamic. Thus, it was intended to collaborate with the interpretation of the proposal and reaches of collaboration among researches and other social groups (WASSER; BRESLER, 1996).

Reflections about the reaches of collaboration are shown by several collaborative researches. In this direction, this article can reassert the comprehension of the role and the status of the university among teachers. The researcher's function and workplace are demystified when it involves directly to the scholar public (not only teachers, but also students and other agents).

The dynamic in meetings, in the present case, aimed at bringing "voice" to the teachers, launching a brand new environment. For sure there was a strengthening from the teacher collective and the recognizing of the importance of the "other" in each one's education process. This way designed, in a medium-term (around three years) the reconstruction of the professional identity (which we barely discussed), teachers could propose new didactic-pedagogical practices which aimed the approach of new themes and resources in their practices and not the repetition of established contents.

To conclude, it is defended here the academic and scientific legitimacy of articles developed in collaboration among teachers and researches. The proposition of training methodologies is fundamental, but they need to be put under analyses from a perspective that deconstruct some misunderstandings and, above all, show the complex and dynamic processes they are involved.

Acknowledgements

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