

**EXPERIENCES IN EDUCATION: LOOKS AT THE DAILY ROUTINE OF A FULL-TIME PUBLIC SCHOOL IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF BELO HORIZONTE/MG****Received on:** October 27, 2024**Passed on:** May 23, 2025License: *Mariana Soares Ferraz Malta<sup>1</sup>*

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**ABSTRACT:** this article is a synthesis of doctoral research carried out in a full-time public school, with the aim of understanding the relationships established in its daily routine through the eyes of the subjects living in the experiences. For 15 months I was present, using cartography as a research method in which monitoring the activities with the teachers and students who made up collective A (6th and 9th year) was fundamental. In this context, I present in this article the results of the conversations held with 9th year students. It was possible to identify that the relationships built in the experience of studying at this school permeate the learning of responsibility, autonomy and freedom, three words that appeared in all the students' statements and constitute fundamental elements that permeate all the school's pedagogical processes.

**KEYWORDS:** School. Experience. Cartography.

**EXPERIÊNCIAS NA EDUCAÇÃO: OLHARES DIVERSOS PARA O COTIDIANO DE UMA ESCOLA PÚBLICA DE TEMPO INTEGRAL NO MUNICÍPIO DE BELO HORIZONTE/MG**

**RESUMO:** este artigo é uma síntese da pesquisa de doutorado realizada numa escola pública de tempo integral, com o objetivo de conhecer as relações estabelecidas no cotidiano desta através do olhar dos sujeitos viventes das experiências. Durante 15 meses estive presente, utilizando a cartografia como método de investigação no qual o acompanhamento das atividades com os professores e estudantes que compunham o coletivo A (6º e 9º ano) foi fundamental. Neste contexto, apresento neste artigo, o resultado das rodas de conversas realizadas com os estudantes do 9º ano. Foi possível

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identificar que as relações construídas na experiência de estudar nesta escola perpassa pelo aprendizado da responsabilidade, autonomia e liberdade, três palavras que apareceram em todas as falas dos estudantes e constituem elementos fundamentais que perpassam todos os processos pedagógicos da escola.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Escola. Experiências. Cartografia.

## **Introduction**

This article is a synthesis of the Ph.D. research that<sup>3</sup> was written by a teacher and alongside teachers working in Basic Education who believe in the social, political-pedagogical, powerful, and transformative role of school in a person's life. The paper was conducted in a full-time public school, which we call the “Escola do Encantamento” [School of Enchantment]. The meaning of the word “enchantment” attributed to the school refers to the idea that, in this place, “in the smallness of ordinary life, knowledge becomes enchanted, and the meanings of the world are reinvented” (Simas and Rufino, 2018, p.13).

For 15 months I was present at the school, seeking to understand the relationships established in its daily routine through the perspectives of the subjects living the experiences, using cartography as the research method in which the follow-up of activities with the teachers and students who composed collective A (6th and 9th grades) was fundamental. In this regard, I present in this article the results of the conversation circles held with the students from the 9th grade.

This school drew our attention for being the only full-time school in the municipal network of Belo Horizonte, as well as for the innovative nature of its Political-Pedagogical Project, built upon the pedagogical foundations rooted in the “Fazer a Ponte” project, developed more than 40 years ago at Escola da Ponte in Portugal. This school stood out for choosing a structural organization different from the

<sup>3</sup> This article is an extension of the thesis text that will be presented in the Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Program in Leisure Studies at Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais – PPGIEL/EEFFTO/UFMG, under the guidance of Professor José Alfredo Debortoli Oliveira, Ph.D.

traditional model that has been “naturalized” over the years, which divides students into groups of the same age. The teaching collective at Escola da Ponte chose to develop a pedagogical structure in which students were grouped according to study interests rather than age. In other words, in a single group there could be students from the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th grades<sup>4</sup>, for example. This is what the school referred to as educational spaces organized by areas<sup>5</sup>. They also chose not to teach using textbooks, manuals, tests, or formal lessons. Not to mention that no exams were administered. Assessment occurred throughout the learning process through portfolios in which students recorded their knowledge every day<sup>6</sup>.

In this context, I began to investigate whether there were schools in Belo Horizonte that were proposing changes in their organizational, structural, and pedagogical processes. My search led me to a school that initially appeared different from the other municipal schools—first, for being a school that proposes to operate full-time<sup>7</sup>, which allows me to consider other practices and another organization of school time and space. Second, because within this school’s pedagogical proposal, there is a dialogue with the perspective of Escola da Ponte, mentioned above, concerning the effort to stage movements of autonomy in the construction of knowledge, seeking to emphasize a school daily routine that is inspired, affected, marked, built, and rebuilt through an ongoing movement to be a school differentiated from the others.

We therefore asked ourselves: in what ways are people affected and touched by the experiences lived in daily routine? In what ways does this school present itself in

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<sup>4</sup> This school organization for high school II, as defined in the municipal education network of Belo Horizonte, was used as an example to understand this merger carried out at Escola da Ponte.

<sup>5</sup> Available at: <http://revistaescola.abril.com.br/informação/jose-pacheco-escola-ponte479055.shtml>.

<sup>6</sup> To learn more about Escola da Ponte: <https://www.escoladaponte.pt/wpcontent/uploads/2021/04/Dispositivos-Pedag%C3%B3gicos.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Schools in the municipal network of Belo Horizonte are organized into two specific shifts, morning or afternoon, which makes the Escola do Conhecimento [School of Knowledge]] the only school in the network that organizes its activities full-time.

practice so that we might verify whether, in fact, it constitutes an “other school”, in the sense of being differentiated from other schools in its organization of time and space, its structure, and the methods used in its pedagogical practice? How do the perspectives of these subjects help me to reflect upon this school? Is this a school that questions itself about the possibilities of expanding, of going beyond a “school form” (Vincent; Lahine; Thin, 2001), of recognizing in everyday life other relationships, other learnings, other ways of experiencing this daily routine in the construction of knowledge? What is learned and how is it learned in this school? What can we observe as leisure experiences within the daily routine of the school?

Based on these questions, we sought to understand to what extent the Escola do Encantamento, through this entire movement of pedagogical construction, expresses itself as a possibility of an “other pedagogy” in its daily routine, and what contributions a leisure-based perspective could bring to this understanding. As specific purpose, we aimed to identify the “other forms of learning” that occur with and among the students.

In this context, if “experience is what happens to us, what befalls us, what touches us” (Larrosa Bondía, 2002, p. 21), then for 15 months we sought to understand what took place, what happened, and what touched the subjects living the experiences in the daily routine of this school. We used cartography as a method of participation and accompaniment of activities together with collective A, composed of teachers and students from the 6th and 9th grades. We mapped the daily routine of the school, following the processes already underway. We found ourselves in a new territory, willing to open ourselves to the encounters that would take place.

To comply with these purposes, it would be necessary to follow the school trajectories, experimenting, experiencing, participating, seeing, feeling, and listening to the school community. Cartography, in this context, presented itself as a powerful

investigative method, for it would provide us with clues to guide the inquiry rather than predetermined rules. The research developed along the way; the goals were constructed and constituted throughout the research process. It was procedural; it was not given; it was not ready (Passos; Kastrup; Escócia, 2020).

In the course of the research, during my presence in the school, conversations were a resource used to listen attentively to what the students told me about the school, the relationships they established, what their routines were like, and how the work modules and everyday events at the school were organized. To listen to the students and teachers, I also used narrative interviews as tools within the research.

Narrative interviews are characterized as unstructured tools, aimed at the depth of specific aspects, from which life stories emerge, both of the interviewee and those intertwined within the situational context. This type of interview seeks to encourage and stimulate the interviewee (informant) to recount something about an important event in their life and social context (Muylaert *et al.*, 2014, p.194).

We spoke with two teachers, who were also mothers of students at the school, with the students of the 9th grade<sup>8</sup>, the school administration, the pedagogical coordination, an experiential educator, and with parents and/or guardians. The diverse perspectives compose the universe of this school and tell us much about the experiences lived in its daily routine. However, for this paper, we chose to present the results of the conversation circles with the students, the central subjects of education.

## **School Structure and Organization**

Escola do Encantamento is a full-time school, that is, the schedule of students is extended, beginning at 8:00 a.m. and ending at 5:00 p.m. Within this structure, there is an organization of activities in the “student’s weekly path”, through which students know what their activities will be. At the start of their routine, students proceed to the

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<sup>8</sup> We chose to hold the discussion circles separately with the boys and girls for logistical reasons related to organizing school activities.

“hall of knowledge”, a space with round tables where students are divided into collective A (6th and 9th grades) and collective B (7th and 8th grades). In this space, students complete study guides, which are activities prepared by the teachers. From this space, depending on the day’s organization, students go to specific classes in Art and Physical Education or to another activity in the auditorium, for example. The time spent in the hall (1 hour and 45 minutes) is devoted to completing the study guides. The idea, at this point, is that students study together and the teacher acts as a tutor assisting when needed.

The routine continues with activities in the connection of knowledge, educational experiences, autonomous activities, responsibility teams, and tutoring. The connection of knowledge is the moment when teachers and experiential educators work together teaching something different to the students. In the experiential activities, students have the opportunity to participate in diverse classes with experiential educators, such as circus arts, capoeira, urban dance, singing, music, sports, robotics, among other activities. Autonomous activities are moments when students choose the activity they would like to do and invite other students to join them, always under the supervision of an experiential educator. This may include, for example, talking in the library or playing hide-and-seek in the wooded area. In the conversation circles, students reported that autonomous activities were more interesting before the pandemic, as they were indeed able to do whatever they wanted. However, many students did not understand this “do whatever you want” and ended up disrupting the moment. For this reason, the educators decided to hold a weekly vote on activities suggested by the students and to leave some pre-established options.

The responsibility teams are composed of students from all 4 grades and assist in organizing activities as well as in resolving conflicts, if they arise. There are

responsibility teams to help organize the hall, the recess area, and conflict resolution; whatever the students' needs may be, responsibility teams are created. Tutoring, in turn, is the moment when the student is in direct contact with their tutor, who is responsible for checking whether activities are being completed, identifying difficulties, and conducting periodic assessments of the student's process. Tutors also serve as a bridge between the family and the school.

All these activities are organized throughout the week. Assessments take place every 3 months. During the conversation circles, I asked the students how they felt within this experience, what they liked most, and what could be improved at the school. In the next topic, we will describe the developments of these conversations.

### **Conversation Circles: What Do the Subjects Living the Experiences Have to Tell Us?**

A school is made of people, and people establish relationships. What do the subjects who live Escola do Encantamento every day have to tell us? What are their enchantments and the crossroads they encounter in relation to the school? In the following passage, we seek to translate into words the experiences lived daily in the school by those who make the school happen. In this regard, we chose to bring the subjects' literal conversation with all its potency through a conversation circle with the 9th-grade students, in a process of "ethnographic listening" as proposed by Rita Segato (2012), without, however, analyzing their statements, for the aim here is to apprehend the school through the lens of those who see.

The conversation circle with the girls and boys of the 9th grade took place separately by gender, due to the organization of that week, according to the students' scheduled departures from the hall, which determined that it be conducted in this way.

The conversation circle with the boys occurred on September 4, 2023, and lasted about 42 minutes. In this conversation, one of the teachers who would have been with them during that time chose to join the conversation. I was concerned that his presence might inhibit some of the students' statements. However, as the conversation progressed, I saw that the students felt comfortable with the teacher and that this would not pose any problem. Below is our conversation.

### **Conversation Circle 1: The Male Students from the 9th Grade**

I began our conversation by explaining to them, once again, what I was doing at the school, my objectives there, and why I wished to talk with them, even though they had seen me accompanying activities almost every day. I asked who had been at the school before the pandemic and who had entered afterward. I wanted to know from them what the school was like before and after the pandemic. Many of them entered the sixth grade in February 2020, and shortly afterward, in March, schools were closed and learning became online. They told me that the school began to organize WhatsApp groups with the classes, and the assignments were sent as PDFs which they could complete digitally or in a notebook and send pictures to the teachers. One student told me that at certain moments during the pandemic, the coordination also printed the study guides, and students went to the school to pick them up.

I asked them what differences they noticed in the school before and after the pandemic. One of the students told me that the school rules are defined by the students themselves, at the beginning of the year, in an assembly. And one of the rules they established is that the hall must be a quieter environment, and when it becomes too noisy, the signal they agreed upon is raising one's hand to indicate the need for silence. However, they claimed that some teachers were breaking this rule and shouting in the

hall to ask for silence. Another point they raised concerned the organization of the hall of knowledge, which they felt had changed significantly and worsened. They explained that at the beginning of 6th grade, in 2020, the hall's organization was the same as it was at that moment: 6th and 9th grades together and 7th and 8th. During the pandemic, there was a separation into "bubbles" which were small groups of students; in 2022, there was yet another organization of the hall, with students grouped in a multigrade structure, that is, in a single group there were students from the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th grades.

The teacher who was present clarified that each year had a different organization.

"In 2018, everything was mixed. In 2019, there were three groups. So it was not by grade level. It was collective A, collective B, and collective C. Then there was the one of the sector. And it worked like this: it included everyone, but for us it became easier because there was a reference point. So we knew, for example, that W., the Physical Education teacher, had worked in that sector on that day. Because in 2018 it was very confusing. That's it. Since the kids could choose any place, imagine: everything and everyone at the same time — it was impossible to know what each student was doing. Then last year (2022), we tried the sector model. There were sectors, they were all mixed. All teachers and educators were mixed, I didn't have tutoring with everyone, but I knew what the red and blue sectors had done, and so on. And this year we thought it would be better to return to an organization of separate collectives. It has its organizational advantages, but also disadvantages — for example, students do not work with all educators, only with those from collective A".

M: This year you are with the sixth grade. What do you think? In terms of your learning? Do you feel that you are learning?

I am in ninth grade and I don't know anything. Last year I got better grades than this year because my performance was better. Since the hall is big, I lose my concentration a lot; I get distracted very easily.

M: You are telling me that learning difficulties are occurring in the hall. But how do you report this difficulty to the tutors?

They give us the study-guide activity, leave it with us, and we have to do it alone. I can't concentrate in the hall. Sometimes I even focus, I'm here doing it. Then I reach a difficult question that I really need to think about. Then I see anything else, and I cannot focus; then I leave my place and forget the activity...

The best moment is when everyone leaves the hall and only the ninth grade stays. Then we can concentrate.

With the study guide, we don't learn anything from any subject, and besides not learning, we are doing the guide there calmly, and suddenly the teacher comes with another activity — like, can I finish the guide? Then we end up with "300" activities to do. There's a movie activity, Physical Education activity, reading-club activity, the study guide...

What also affects us a lot is that we end up very tired. We have experiential sessions, we have connection...

M: I was going to ask you exactly about the amount of time you spend at school...

I think it should be divided — morning shift and afternoon shift — because staying the whole day is exhausting, and we don't even have more moments to rest because recess is also tiring, especially because we come back from recess for the second period in the hall, we're "dead," and we have to do Physical Education, the study guide. We can't rest for two minutes before the teachers start telling us to work.

After lunch, there are days when there's a movie. How are we supposed not to fall asleep?

M: You told me that recess is also tiring...

It's too noisy, too many people, too much happening. There isn't a specific place because everywhere is full of people. The bathroom is full of people, the stairs are full, the court, the hallway — everywhere is crowded. There's no place where we can sit, relax, and breathe. Not to mention that recess goes by quickly. For me, recess should be longer.

M: What would be your suggestion for recess?

Going to the woods<sup>9</sup>. There was a time when they allowed us to go to the woods. Last year they allowed the library and the computer sciences during recess. Nowadays, not anymore. Going back to the study guide issue, most people here barely got through half of the guide, and they're already coming with another one. Besides the other activities that make no sense. We wanted a normal class, for example, math — the teacher explains the material, and we copy the exercises. They give us the activity, hand it to us, and think we're going to learn on our own. I think that when they are going to teach something new, instead of just leaving it there and thinking we'll learn on our own, they should take the ninth grade to another room and then, in the following weeks, have practical lessons so we can retain it.

For me, they should remove the study guide and give normal assignments.

I really like the school, but the study-guide thing is also complicated. For me, during class periods, there should be an actual class, not the guide.

You can ask any ninth-grade girl what she learned this year in Portuguese, geography, history, science — everyone will say: nothing.

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<sup>9</sup>The woods is a space within the school with trees and greenery where students can relax.

M: I am understanding from our conversation that the study guide is not making much sense to you...

Indeed. Another thing they brought up that makes no sense: the logbook.

M: What is the purpose of the logbook?

To write down what we did during the day. But they want us to write down everything — even when I went to the bathroom. I can summarize the activities. Not record every single module. I think it should be like a normal diary. For example: Oh, today the experiential session was very tiring, but I learned this... They want everything written down. I don't even remember what I ate for lunch!

M: Speaking of experiential sessions, how are those activities organized? Do you like them?

It's the best moment. It's more useful than the subjects. We learn more in the experiential sessions than with the guide.

M: What are the autonomous activities?

The students themselves can suggest spaces. For example, if many students want to fly kites, an educator can take them. But most of the time, there is foosball, futsal, cinema, the library — no one comes up with new suggestions. Then we choose where we want to go, you know. It's the moment when we have the autonomy to choose where we will stay, and it's not a place where we are 100% free, just left there. We choose what we are going to do, and there has to be some planning. Sometimes there are already students assigned to organize the autonomous activities. But there are also predefined spaces, like the court or the woods.

## **Conversation Circle 2: The Female Students from the 9th Grade**

The conversation circle with the girls of the 9th grade was held on July 10, 2023 at 2:44 p.m. and lasted 1 hour. Ten girls were present that day. It was an informal conversation in which they were able to tell me about the school through their own perspectives.

To begin the conversation, I started by explaining the research, the objectives, and what I was doing at the school. I told them that Escola do Encantamento was a school different from other schools in the municipal network of Belo Horizonte, and also different from most schools in the country. The structure, the organization of activity times, the physical space — all this, in itself, was already enough for the school to be researched, and that was what I was doing there: getting to know the school's daily life, the relationships established among students, between students and teachers, and between students and the school environment. I asked how many of them had studied at the school since the 6th grade. Five students answered positively. I then asked them to tell me a little about the school — what they liked most, what they did not like, what the school represented for them.

The school I experienced in the 6th and 7th grades, the years before the pandemic, and the 8th grade, which occurred during the pandemic, were different from the school I experience this year (2023).

M: That is interesting. Tell me, then, what the school was like before the pandemic and after the pandemic.

Before the pandemic, I studied very little — it was only 10 days of class when I was in the sixth grade. It was not much, there was not much. But even in those 10 days I already went on a field trip, met new people, and it was nice. Then the pandemic came and the classes went online. Even though they were online, we could still interact with

other people. The online classes were not very nice. We received activities in PDF format and could complete them in writing. Then we submitted them or sent photos. But it wasn't very nice. Still, there were some different activities. There was the Asia Connection, there was dance class. Because in terms of content, content itself, either you came to school and picked up the printed study guide, or they delivered it to you depending on your situation, or you received it via PDF. You could also print it. Some people printed it, and it was very bad, because if I talk now about the 8th grade, I won't know anything about the 8th grade, because during the pandemic I learned more dance — from the Asia Connection. As for academic subjects, I didn't learn them. There was Physical Education, there was dance. I don't even know how I passed the grade.

The 8th grade was the best year, last year. It was very good — we had many field trips, many different classes. It was nice how the school worked: the groups, the activities, the teachers — I thought everything was very nice. The people who studied here. Very cool. Then came this year. Everything went downhill for me, in my opinion, in my big opinion. I don't know, things at the school changed a lot. Because they change a bit every year. Some things, like the organization of the hall of knowledge, change; teachers change; and, whether we like it or not, students change too. But this year it changed and I didn't like it much. And most people I talk to also preferred the previous years, those who had already studied here before.

M: But what, for you, was different from last year to this year that made it bad?

The organization of the hall went back to being like it was in 2020. But in 2020 it was cool; now it isn't. I thought 2020 was cool. Now it is Collective A and Collective B. And Collective A is 9th and 6th grades. I don't really like that. 9th with 6th. I know the idea is that the 9th helps the 6th, but I don't think it works. The 6th graders are

always rebellious with us; they don't want to learn anything. And they get in our way.

That's what I think.

M: And what was it like last year?

Last year it was organized by sectors. There were six sectors: yellow, blue, green, orange, red, and purple. And the tables were not like they are now — like 6th and 9th at the same table and 7th and 8th on the other side. It was mixed. At the same table there were students from 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th grades. And they were not round tables; they were square tables. But later they changed to round ones. I thought it was much better that way, and that was how the hall was organized. Other things were also different, I think. And there were other teachers, and now the teachers and educators have changed a lot. And the coordination team changed as well.

M: And do you, girls, agree with your classmate's opinion? Do you want to add something?

Student 2: Regarding the collective, last year was better. The issue of our noise — as students. This year it is much better. We get quiet much faster. Last year it took a long time. If we had had this system of losing autonomous activity time last year, we wouldn't have autonomous activities, because it was so messy<sup>10</sup>. So this year, regarding the 6th graders, I think we are keeping them well in line, the way the school is supposed to be — organized. So this year the silence issue and the behavior issue are much more organized. There are fights, there are more difficulties — yes. But it is much better than last year, also in terms of activities.

Another thing I think is that they have advanced more in teaching, in content. I think they are teaching more advanced things to us in the 9th grade than they taught to

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<sup>10</sup>Here the student is referring to a type of punishment that was taking place. Because they took a long time to be quiet in the hall of knowledge, the same amount of time was reduced during the time allotted for independent activities.

the 9th grade last year. And the 6th graders are using the 8th grade study guide from last year. I think they have advanced a lot in teaching.

M: How is the issue of learning, of content, through the study guides? Do you feel you are learning? Or not? Do you talk to the teachers about this?

Our study guide this year only arrived now (June). So we can't really comment on it, because we basically just received it; they have just started talking about it and everything. So, I don't know.

Another student: We can talk about it. Because what the School of Enchantment emphasizes, like the core of everything, is autonomy. Us being autonomous. So they give us the thematic study guide and we study what is there. All right. But then there is the issue of autonomy. With the subjects we want to learn, we need to search on YouTube, in books, because if we only rely on the thematic study guide, we don't learn anything. It's impossible to get real knowledge just from the thematic guide. Only if you take the content that is there and study it outside. Using books, YouTube, and studying. But we don't look up everything...

There was a moment of discussion among them about the study guide, because for some of them it is useless to have the guide if students do not study the topics using other research sources such as the internet, for example.

M: Help me understand. The study guide is supposed to be a study route, right? The guide is for you to learn the content you need according to the subjects. And then, of course, we have YouTube, Google, which help in this process of acquiring knowledge. M: But when you are there in the hall, then, is it difficult to take the guide and work on it? Do the teachers help? Do you help one another?

When there are many teachers, all right — they help. When there are few, they also help. The issue is not the teacher. It is because, regardless of whether you are in a

group, the hall is very noisy and I cannot concentrate. I am a person who makes a lot of noise. But to concentrate on something, I need complete silence. Like, I just can't. I'm trying to do something here, I'm trying to read, and there is someone talking right next to me — I cannot concentrate. I don't know why. I just can't. I don't know. I can't study here. When I missed school the week before last — I missed the whole week — I thought: "Damn, I must be behind on the study guide, I need to do something". Then I picked up the guide, and it was just me and my sister in the other room, so I took the guide and managed to complete a bunch of pages. It was really cool. Then I thought: I'll finish it at school, right? I got here and couldn't finish a single page.

One thing I think is that, besides the study guide, they keep giving us other activities, and then you don't know whether to focus on the guide or on the activities. For example, you are on a page in the study guide that discusses a specific topic. So you go there and study it. But you cannot concentrate only on that because at the same time you need to finish another activity — something totally different from what you are studying. Then sometimes you cannot work on the study guide because they want you to do that other task. And at another moment they want you to do the guide. And you get confused because you cannot fully concentrate on that moment. Or, for example, "this week I'll focus on this activity," because I managed to prioritize it in my mind. But you cannot do that. In short, the issue is this: they have a proposal, but they are not able to implement that proposal properly.

M: Do you have a set time to complete the study guide? Is it one guide per year?  
How does it work?

This year we are very behind with the guide. Last year there were two thematic guides and one study guide. Last year's study guides had QR codes to access the subject content, and we had to use tablets and the textbook.

M: How is the guide assessed? At what moment do you talk to the teachers to evaluate it?

Usually during tutoring, but not all teachers do it. The teachers assess whether we are doing anything. Last year I was in Professor E.'s tutoring group. He was more attentive. He would take the guide and look at it, page by page. And he would talk to us, asking about an activity that was blank, why we had not completed it.

M: You used an interesting word: autonomy. What does autonomy mean to you? How is this process, this learning of becoming autonomous?

I don't think I had autonomy, no. Actually, I didn't even know what that word meant when I arrived. I think autonomy today and autonomy in 2020, for me, is nothing and everything. Now I think autonomy is something we use all the time in our lives. For example: I go to the market to buy bread. You need autonomy to go there. You need to know how much you need to spend, how much you can spend to buy something at the market. If I go to the market to buy garlic and rice, then I go and buy rice, then I see chips, chocolate, soda, then I take them. But you take them knowing the consequences later. That is autonomy. A person who has no autonomy and has money will take everything they want without autonomy. You need to know how to choose your attitudes, your actions wisely to understand the consequences.

M: And in what way does the school teach you to have autonomy?

Through autonomous activities. But I think that in the autonomous activities we don't have much autonomy. Many times in school we have much more autonomy than in the autonomous activities. I think that the autonomous activities teach much more autonomy — like, I learned a lot more about autonomy in the autonomous activities. Because they said: "oh, we have autonomous activities". And I said: what is

‘autonomous’? The proposal for the autonomous activities is very good; the execution is terrible.

M: So, tell me about this school structure: connection, autonomous activities, life practices, tutoring...

One thing in which I think we have a lot of autonomy is choosing what we will do. We choose which teacher we will stay with for tutoring; we choose what we will do in the connection session; we choose which activity we want to participate in, which activity we will feel comfortable with in the life practice session. I think this is something schools should have, because you feel like an important person. Like the mandala they have<sup>11</sup>, which I always like to mention and no one talks about. It shows all the activities in the school, and in the middle is the student; so we are the center. If it is not that way, there is nothing around it. So, whether we like it or not, this ‘thing about choosing’ gives you autonomy and makes you feel better — or not. I feel more important in the school because without me nothing happens. Without the students there is no school.

M: The students who are new to the school, tell me what your previous school was like.

In my previous school I felt very restricted. There is this thing here of life practices and connection. You will never see that in a traditional school. Here there are rules, and the students know how to respect them. A bit... And the difference is that they put students to guide other students.

A student contests: It’s at the same level — guiding someone at your same level, right? Yes. First school I know that works like this. Objection: There is no teacher bossing students around. We have a friendship. Our relationship with them is very good.

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<sup>11</sup> Mandala is a design referenced by the school where the student is at the center and the activities are structured around them, placing the student at the heart of the pedagogical approach.

M: What is the difference between connection, life practices, tutoring, autonomous activities? What is connection?

It is a connection between teachers and educators giving a class together.

M: So, an educator joins a teacher and they teach something together.

Yes, but it has to be something that is not in their area. It's like a proposal. For example: I work with workshops, I take computer science classes. In my connection I cannot teach computer science; it has to be something new, you know? Something I will create with another teacher. To create a new activity, different from both educators' training.

M: Do you choose which connection you will participate in? And does it change from semester to semester?

It changes each semester. Only tutoring does not change. Because you build a better relationship with your teacher.

M: And tutoring is the teacher helping you with what you need?

He is your tutor.

M: Experiences? What are they? What do educators teach?

They teach something for life, you know? Like circus arts. Circus might seem useless. But if you think about it, it's not that useless, you know? Because, like, I might work in something very different from circus arts, but sometimes circus can help. Anything you learn will be useful at some point, you know? The school's proposal is good. Because we have two life practice sessions, right? We learn a little of each. Then we carry that into life.

M: And autonomous activities? What are they?

The proposal of autonomous activities is that we choose a place and do what we want there, having autonomy, responsibility, and wisdom — love in your heart to do

what is right. Like, I come to the EJA room and stay there drawing; I am not going to play basketball in here. But then they started restricting it, right? Some things happened at school and they started restricting our autonomy. Now it's just the sports court, barely the grove, the auditorium, the library, and the computer sciences. Before, we could stay behind the tent, talking, because we could. There would just be one educator supervising. Because that is the proposal. But now, no. Now it has changed a lot.

M: And does an educator need to be with you?

Yes. They won't give us activities, won't do anything. They just stay there.

M: But if these are autonomous activities and the school teaches you autonomy and responsibility, why does someone need to be with you?

Because some students really do not have autonomy, students who are going to kiss at school, skip class, who might do all sorts of things.

M: But I return to the question: If you have a process of self-regulation, meaning you help the sixth grade students, do you really need an educator with you?

There are students who don't even respect educators, imagine us.

M: What will you take from here to the other school you will attend next year, since it will be a traditional school again? How do you imagine it will be?

It will be terrible! Look at the school we are used to? I'm not speaking badly... I am just saying that they are different kinds of studies... I will get there saying: where is my choice? I want my right to choose here... But I think we will know how to use our knowledge from here over there... I think next year I will have a better mindset to deal with something different... Even because when we came here, we were not used to this school... And I got used to it. So I will know how to handle it... And we can take our knowledge to help improve other schools... Try, right, because traditional schools are very closed.

M: And how do your conversations go with colleagues or friends who study in other schools?

They see our school with a very bad image. A school that lets us too loose, as if we didn't do anything... Even I, when I found out I would come here, I cried a lot... I was really afraid of coming here because I was in fifth grade, moving to sixth, and I saw the ninth graders — huge... In terms of studying too, I thought I wouldn't learn anything.

My brother makes fun of me when I say I stay at school all day, studying. Studying what? He says. But he didn't have the same experience I have, because he entered here in ninth grade, when they were coming back from the pandemic and forming 'bubbles'. So he doesn't really know the school.

Thinking about competitions, we only have them here every year. It is the first school I know that trains badminton, has a fixed sport like badminton, shot put, things that are not volleyball or soccer, at least not all the time.

One thing that is also very good in this school. We don't work only with the mind; we work with the body too, you know. Because if you go to other schools you won't see that, because they are always sitting at a desk, writing.

I came from Rio de Janeiro. When I arrived here at school I asked a colleague: which class am I in? There is no class here. I said: what do you mean? Everyone is together, you'll understand. Before enrolling, I came to see the school and started exploring it. I saw that there were bathrooms with mall-style doors, a library, lockers for students to store their belongings. I saw that uniforms were not required. At first it was different, but after the pandemic I liked it... I think the pandemic made us value school more, friends and so on... Because we were very restricted, right? Very much in a cocoon.

Another student: Another student: This school is very different from all other public schools, as everyone knows... and when I arrived here, I was very shocked because I had never seen a school where everyone is together... So I was really shocked — of course, new things, right? Who doesn't get shocked with new things? I didn't know if it was good, until I got here.

When I arrived, I stood still thinking: how will I manage here? How will I learn here? Like, will I fit in? There were days when I didn't fit in, I thought my old school was better than this one. I had never seen this school, and then I started seeing how the school was literally different — not just different, but different in a good way. So for me, being different was good because I learned many new things. In my other school, I had no opinion, I had no choice. If I wanted to do something, I couldn't. So coming here, I feel more open, I managed to fit in.

### **Reflections from a Research Project on “Another School”**

The guiding question/problem of this research was whether the Escola do Encantamento could, in fact, constitute itself as an “other school” in its day-to-day practices—beyond what was written in its Pedagogical Political Project—and how the lens of leisure experiences could help us understand what was taking place in that school. Over the course of the 15 months I spent in the school, I was able to observe activities, interact with teachers and students, and participate in various events. We chose to present herein an excerpt from our conversation with the 9th-grade students, opting not to assume the intellectual role of interpreting what the other says, nor to act as their spokesperson. We set out to bring forth this “other”—the students—speaking for themselves.

We understand that a conventional process of knowledge production would follow an already pre-established and predetermined path, in which what is expected of

a researcher is that they go into the school to construct an empiricism, a world framed representationally through a theoretical apparatus. This apparatus would generate categories or markers through which the researcher would organize that world, producing an interpretive synthesis—an analytical synthesis—of the empiricism. That would be a conventional form of knowledge production. However, that is not exactly what we did in this dissertation.

We return here to the statement of Larrosa Bondía (2002, p. 21): “if experience is what happens to us, what befalls us, what touches us,” then our research movement sought, throughout these 15 months, to grasp what was happening, what was taking place, what was touching the living subjects in that everyday context. In speaking about their experiences, each person brought forth what mattered most to them, what was most significant, what most affected them. The students told me about what bothered them at school and what could be improved.

During the months spent participating in the school’s daily life, we observed a pedagogical project aimed at educating students toward full autonomy and responsibility for their own educational process. The activities carried out throughout the week (hall of knowledge, tutoring, connection of knowledge, autonomous activities, educational life practices) are conceived and implemented with these objectives. In the conversation circles with the students from 9th grade, we identified three words that form a tripod supporting the school’s human-formation project: autonomy, responsibility, and freedom. Experiences of leisure—through singing, dancing, music, circus arts, capoeira, physical education, and the arts more broadly—are present across all school activities: knowledge connection, life practices, autonomous activities. Learning is mediated by the bodily freedom of feeling well and feeling happy. Nevertheless, the challenges remain significant.

According to the students' accounts, the way the study guide was designed and the proposed manner of completing it represented one of the major challenges in the hall of knowledge. The excessive number of activities was another. Conversations in the learning hall—which was supposed to remain quiet so that students could focus—also presented difficulties, both for students and for teachers. The traditional school form still manifests itself in the attitudes of students and teachers who have not adapted to the new educational format, resisting and desiring a return to the old educational model. Nevertheless, this school showed us that it is possible to organize school time with activities integrated into its curricular structure that go beyond mandatory content, in such a way that, after 4 years of experience, the student can become a freer human being, more responsible and autonomous in their educational processes, understanding their role as a social subject within the world to which they belong and in which they act.

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