

STRUGGLING FOR IDENTITY:
A STORY IN BETWEEN LINES OF OPPRESSION AND FREEDOM

EM BUSCA DE IDENTIDADE: UMA HISTÓRIA ENTRE LINHAS DE
OPRESSÃO E LIBERDADE.

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a sociological and discourse study of identity construction of a young undergraduate student from the State University of Londrina. It stems from data generated by means of his diary writing in 2009. The analysis portrays his struggles throughout his life, and explores the content of two emerging identities, namely one of the oppressed and one of the free man. Consent to use the diary data was given by the participant in written form, and his agreement with the analysis was expressed in writing. Contributions of the study are addressed to school leaders, educators, students, and parents.

KEYWORDS: teacher education; identity; oppression; freedom.

RESUMO

Este artigo relata um estudo sociológico e discursivo da construção de identidade de um jovem aluno de graduação da Universidade Estadual de Londrina. Ele provém de dados gerados a partir de sua escrita de diário em 2009. A análise retrata suas lutas ao longo de sua vida e explora o conteúdo de duas identidades emergentes, nomeadamente, uma de oprimido e a outra de homem livre. Consentimento para usar os dados do diário foi dado pelo participante em forma escrita, e sua concordância com a análise, expressa da mesma forma. Contribuições do estudo são dirigidas a líderes escolares, educadores, alunos e pais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: formação de professores; identidade; opressão; liberdade.

One becomes aware that 'belonging' and 'identity' are not cut in rock, that they are not secured by a lifelong guarantee, that they are eminently negotiable and revocable; and that one's own decisions, the steps one takes, the way one acts – and the determination to stick by all that – are crucial factors of both (Bauman, 2004:11).

I would simply like to agree with this contention expressed by the Polish, post-modern thinker who moved to England after being prevented from doing his own work, that is, teaching, in his home country. In this case study report, it is the identity construction of a youngster that is under focus, and, by sketching it, I highlight the lines of oppression and freedom which compose his life story. For someone who has always experienced difficulty, not only does this identity require the determination postulated by Bauman but also brutal individual efforts and support of experienced others.

This study is motivated by my singular need to consider the *other and his trajectory* as inspiring elements in teacher identity constructions which are marked by their very distinguishing quality: humanity. This is taken as the mankind's unique capacity to have critical perception of their reality and to take action to transform it (Freire, 1968/1970).

As an adviser of Pedro (fictitious name), the main actor of this narrative, I think his story, as an *allegory* – which carries moral values –, consists of a "method of empowerment for readers and a means for readers to discover moral truths about themselves" (Denzin, 1997, apud Schwandt, 2003: 200). It also serves the purpose of fostering transformative actions by parents, students, school leaders and managers.

I organize the paper in four parts. First, I share the theoretical framework with which I shall discuss the results. Secondly, I present the methodology espoused and its respective epistemology. Then, I proceed to the results, and, finally, to a discussion and conclusion of this paper.

1. Identity

According to post-modern sociological conceptions, identity in this study is the object of an incessant struggle, "the daunting task of 'squaring a circle' [...] that can never be completed in a 'real time', but [...] in infinity" (Bauman, 2004: 10-11). An identity can be chosen but not necessarily achieved; it can be as desired as denied, and as rejected as imposed. If and when achieved, identity can also be revoked. Its duration is uncertain (Bauman, 2004).

Related to identity are the notions of belonging to a group, class or community. These, in turn, can be of two types (Bauman, 2004: 11): (1) *life communities (in which people live together in an indissoluble attachment)* and (2) *fate communities (which are welded together solely by ideas or various principles)*. Belonging, which has

an integrating/disciplining function, "is constantly given flesh and reinvigorated by the threat and practice of exclusion" (Bauman, 2004: 22).

An identity, for Bauman (2004), is always haunted by the possibility of losing it, in general for failure ascribed to the individual and by the external attribution of an unwanted identity. Therefore, the consequences for the individual and groups can be just as positive – for the prestige of the identity – as negative – when it comes to "stereotyping, humiliating, dehumanizing, stigmatizing identities" (Bauman, 2004: 38).

Those who are given no say in the choice of their identity are referred to as *underclass* (Bauman, 2004: 39). They carry identities imposed by others, which "they themselves resent but are not allowed to shed and cannot manage to get rid of" (p. 38). In ascribed identities – one of the types referred to by Bauman – I highlight the involuntary position of those who receive them.

In sum, identity construction demands "squaring a circle" (Bauman, 2004:10); it is, on the one hand, struggled for and sustained by the choice, desire, and determination to belong to a community. Then again, an identity can be barred from, denied to, ascribed to, claimed from, and enforced on the individual and on communities. In other words, identity is the object of a pursuit subordinate to individual and social (hence contextual, historical, and cultural) factors.

In this study, just as fundamental as these understandings about identity are Freire's concepts of *freedom* and *oppression*.

2. Freedom and oppression

According to the dialectical thought of Brazilian, educator and language philosopher, formerly asylum-seeker, Freire, freedom is the opposite of oppression. The latter, dehumanising, needs to be superseded by constant struggle for the former. For Freire, freedom is not a gift bestowed; it is conquered. This concept converges with Bauman (2004)'s concept of identity since freedom is understood as an indispensable condition in struggle moves in which men exist as uncompleted beings (Freire, 1968/1970).

Freire considers men as capable of changing their reality, of overcoming situations of oppression, of pursuing a "fuller humanity" (Freire, 1968/1970: 32). This, he contends, cannot be achieved by naïve idealism, but by means of 'critical intervention' in the oppressive situation. Overcoming this requires action, which he considers inseparable from reflection. Identity construction demands responsibility of those who pursue it.

To no longer be prey to its [oppression] force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can be done only by means of the praxis:

reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it (Freire, 1968/1970, p. 36).

For Freire, individuals must be active and must fight as *men* and not *things* (op cit: 55). Comparing men, capable of reasoning, to animals, Freire asserts:

Unable to decide for themselves, unable to objectify either themselves or their activity, lacking objectives which they themselves have set, living 'submerged' in a world to which they can give no meaning, lacking a 'tomorrow' and a 'today' because they exist in an overwhelming present, animals are ahistorical (Freire, 1968/1970: 87).

In this line of thought, *men* are to *agents* (who exert and hold control of their action) as *animals* are to *objects* (which receive the action).

Development, which results from liberating transformation, demands the mentioned struggle by the individual with efforts not only around but also within himself (Freire, 1968/1970).

Upon critical perception of the reality they want to transform, individuals experience feelings of hope and confidence in their actions to overcome "limit-situations" (Freire, 1968/1970: 89). These can refer to existential situations (p. 108). Critical perception of reality distinguishes the elements of oppressing conditions. For Freire (op. cit), it is possible that individuals do not experience critical perception of reality and for this reason both education and educators have an important role in those individuals' process of reality decoding. This process is meant to deal with thematics raised by the very individuals.

Both freedom and oppression are present in various stances of social interactions: family and domestic, pedagogical, political and governmental, local and global ones. Freire contends that oppression is also sustained by "false generosity" (p. 29), which domesticates individuals and keeps them dependent on those who have the control and who impose them the oppressing situations.

Aware that nowadays such ideas of freedom and oppression can be taken as mere wordiness, I share the understanding that "we cannot say that [...] someone liberates someone else, nor yet someone liberates himself, but rather that men in communion liberate each other" (Freire, 1968/1970: 128).

In conclusion to this theoretical framework, I highlight the relevance of the dichotomies *freedom/oppression*, *men/animals*, *agents/objects* (Freire, 1968/1970), *belonging* and *exclusion* (Bauman, 2004), and the ideas of *incessant struggle* (Freire, 1968/1970), *identity incompleteness* (Bauman, 2004), and *human incompleteness* (Freire, 1968/1970). I now refer to the methodological design of the present study.

3. Methodology

Epistemologically, I set this study within social constructionism, whereby humans construct and deconstruct meanings; reality is not separate from individuals who are placed in social context. This is embedded with ideologies and implies power relations. The object which is investigated is not amenable to being revealed (as if covered) in an objective manner, as assumed by interpretivism. In constructionist epistemology (Schwandt, 2003), "human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it" (p. 197). "We are self interpreting beings" and "language constitutes this being" and is considered as "a range of activities in which we express and realize a certain way of being in the world" (p. 198).

Aiming at investigating the identity construction of a student attending the undergraduate, English language and literature teacher preparation course at the State University of Londrina, Brazil, I draw on written entries of a diary whose aim was to recall and re-story what had been cast in the schooling process throughout his life. In such exercise of taking distance from the lived reality, diary writing was also meant to make the student develop what Freire (1968/1970: 108) coins as "perception of their previous perception". Another reason for diary writing was to promote the student's 'decoding' of his lived reality, as a means to support the development of critical recognition of such reality.

I asked Pedro to write the diary in the context of his participation in the research project, *Critical literacy in English language teacher education*¹. The diary results from his free writing, that is, void of any model for reference. It was handwritten in Portuguese, on a notebook, bearing on the first page his name, address, phone number and e-mail address. His writing is not neutral and his lexical choices certainly reveal his imaginary readers, the context and stage of his development when writing the diary. In this case study, I explore entries written over 30 consecutive days.

Prior to analysing the diary entries, I asked these questions:

1. What kind (or kinds) and content (or contents) of identity do I relate to Pedro throughout the stories which he tells?

¹ Universidade Estadual de Londrina, Pró-Reitoria de Pesquisa e Pós-Graduação [Deanship of Research and Graduate studies]. Diretoria de Pesquisa. Divisão de Cadastro e Acompanhamento. *Relação de Pesquisas Cadastradas*. Projeto 05428 - Letramento crítico na educação de professores de inglês [Critical Literacy in English Language Teacher Education]. Available at https://www.sistemasweb.uel.br/system/pes/pdf/pes_pesquisa_05428.pdf. Retrieved on March 9th, 2010. The project investigates learning of undergraduates in process of critical literacy in the context of their initial preparation to teach English. Situated cognition, socio-cultural-historical learning and social theory are theoretical underpinnings of the project.

2. To what context (or contexts) do I relate such an identity (or identities)?
3. What ontology (or ontologies) underlies (or underlie) such an identity (or identities)?

In the next section, I present the results of the research by answering questions one to three together. I carried out the analysis inductively and deductively for identification of themes. I explored the text in its various types of texture, especially the lexical, semantic and critical ones. In regard to the latter, given my espoused view of language as an instrument of power (FAIRCLOUGH, 1989/2001; 1992; 1992/2007), I tried to identify the position of the social actors referred to in the entries. I also paid attention to language aspects such as person, voice, discourse, tense, and language tropes.

Through the lenses of social constructionism, my theoretical-methodological assumptions afford me the *perspectism* (FAY, 1996) necessary to describe and explain the world, the reality told by Pedro. For this reason, the analysis is partial and an invitation to the reader to deal with other possibilities of interpretation.

As I concluded the analysis, I shared it with Pedro via e-mail², in order to enable editing of the text to be published with his informed consent. Besides, I discussed the original version of this text, in Portuguese, with my colleagues, Gladys Quevedo-Camargo, Telma Gimenez, and this English version with my supporters, Piet-Hein van de Ven, John Robert Schmitz, Richard Andrews, and Catherine Wallace, in order to scrutinize the coherence of my interpretations, sufficiency of illustrations and clarity of my writing.

4. Life and fate: from oppression to freedom

The ongoing construction of Pedro as an individual has been embossed by two types of identity: *life* and *fate* (Bauman, 2004). The former, *life identity*, is written by lines of oppression; the latter, *fate identity*, by struggle for freedom.

4.1 Identity of the oppressed

Because *life* identity implies his insertion in a community where the individual shares with others the place of birth, Pedro's community, since his childhood until the beginning of adulthood, was a small town in the inner of a southern state in Brazil. Throughout those years, Pedro did not choose his schools, principals or classmates. They all belonged to that place because life circumstances placed each and all of them in the same time and space. The same is true of his family: he does not choose it; he has

² The reason to use this means was my physical absence from Brazil in 2010.

it. *In this paper, it is my interpretation that*³ Pedro's life communities, since his childhood until the first steps into adulthood, write his identity of the *oppressed*.

Oppression comes from unwanted identities ascribed to Pedro. They repeatedly humiliate him and portray him as a less capable, incapable being, dismissed from making choices, and ridiculed for making them. These identities deny him the possibility of being a *fuller man*— as opposed to *animal*, to *object* (Freire, 1968/1970).

I have chosen the following excerpts to give evidence of the grounds of my interpretations. I use italics for my emphasis in the excerpts which I selected from Pedro's diary. They are in crescent chronological sequence, dated in between brackets, and I discuss the illustrations individually.

I joined it [the school] at the end of the third year of pre-elementary school. Since then I *never felt as belonging to school* [Pedro, 30.09.09].

As per the excerpt above, *belonging* - which Bauman considers necessary to the construction of individual's identity - is not part of Pedro's existence. On the contrary, the beginning of his schooling process is marked by exclusion. The school, as I inferred from his words, could have been a *fate* community in which Pedro could have shared with the school actors more than social, economic, and geographic factors; the school could have supported his love for learning, besides other human development sustaining possibilities.

My mother [...] did not attend the [school] meetings, maybe out of *shame*. I always heard from teachers that I was a boy of excellent behaviour *but who produced nothing* [Pedro, 02.10.09].

In the entry above, as well as in other ones, Pedro's story fragment is characterised by absence of his self initiated action. Those who he cites occupy a higher hierarchical position, both in the family and institutional structures. In his account of a relative's possible embarrassment and his reproduction of the indirect speech of his teachers, he vocalizes that which could have been an irrevocable sentence. Thus, this absence of production marks his identity as a feature independent of his wish and rather formed by the perceptions of others.

What Pedro questions when he writes his diary (by using the conjunction *but* in *but produced nothing*) seems to have been naturalised by his family in his childhood. In his diary entries, referring to his mother, Pedro reveals the way which she, in position

³ I am greatly indebted to John Robert Schmitz, whose attentive and critical reading of my writing back in May 2010 made me rewrite this paragraph years later in order to share this paper with a larger readership.

of authority, referred to him, as if he were deprived of rational and emotional flesh so as not to be hit by degrading comparisons:

I remember *the many times* she would argue with my brothers when they got low grades at school. She used to say, *Pedro can get low grades because he is dumb, but you can't. If you do, you'll be punished*. I heard that throughout all my schooling [Pedro, 02.10.09].

School years came only to continue the story of *no belonging*, the lack of agency, the absence of action. Pedro's vivid memories bring his comparison with others in the micro structure of his family and in the local school context. The others, regardless of where they exist, enjoy intellectual advantage over Pedro. His language is marked by his present perception of his position of object of actions exerted by others in the past. This perception of his is nuanced by his use of passive voice and the semantic structuring for reference to external wants and dispositions.

Being ridiculed contributes to the formation of an imposed identity, which Pedro cannot rid himself of during his school trajectory. He recalls his compensation feeling for virtue of physical ability – quality by which he could recognise himself in others in the temporary identity of a great footballer:

Having failed already in the second grade, nothing interested me. I exited the second grade and went to the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, till the eighth [grade] *being pushed*. The state wanted that, most teachers did not care and my mom did not bother. I saw my youngest sister pass the school grade and reach me. I was *the topic of jokes at home and at school. I did not mind, I was good at football and there were others like me* at school [Pedro, 03.10.09].

The next two excerpts of the diary give evidence, once again, of practices of exclusion at school. On the basis of academic achievement, these practices were implemented by social actors in higher institutionalised positions. The following excerpts report on the action by others inflicted on those who occupied the position of *objects*. It is not these, the objects, which have control over the action exerted by others. As objects, they are classifiable, they receive stigmatising labels which, thus, carry an identity that is enforced on and is neither chosen nor wanted by them (Bauman, 2004). The *objects* of Freire are the *underclass* of Bauman:

I remember a teacher who *separated the students*. On the right, the *high grade* students. On the left, the *lower grade* ones [Pedro, 04.10.09].

In the eighth grade, I failed again because of absences and grades. It was when the school principal had the '*excellent*' idea of recycling the school. *He took all those lagging behind and dumped them in a same room*. I was one of the worst students at school. Twenty-four other students and me [Pedro, 06.10.09].

In the excerpt above, Pedro uses *irony* to refer to the action exerted by that who had the authority position (i.e. the principal). The use of inverted commas distinguishes the quality he attributes to the decision taken by the one in control of the situation.

Exclusion, when not promoted by physical-spatial segregation strategies, is also exerted by psycho-social ones. In the following excerpt, a single look is enough to revoke the identity desired by an individual and his willingness to belong to a group. To be in a group, thus, does not mean to genuinely enjoy the status of the aimed position (Bauman, 2004):

My classmates thought it strange in the beginning: a guy two years older [in the classroom] but they soon got used to that. It was *the teachers who wouldn't. Their look of disdain would put me down* [Pedro, 11.10.09].

In order to finish these illustrations of the identity of the oppressed, I present two – from several – diary excerpts in which Pedro reports on his family's reaction to his expression of a wish, and to his pursuit of professional education:

I remember when I came to my parents and said I wanted to be a translator. My brothers, *they laughed at me. Once again I felt I was not capable* [Pedro, 17.10.09].

I saved money for my trip and on the day of leaving for Londrina, my mother spoke out to me and sermonized. She said the university is only for the wealthy or else for the gifted like my brother. That was what she said. That devastated me and once again the past reminded me that I was not capable [Pedro, 22.10.09].

In the first of the two excerpts above, the action by top hierarchy family members humiliates Pedro with expression of discouragement. In the second excerpt, where the same asymmetry characterises the positions taken by the participants of the reported interaction, the identity desired, chosen and struggled for is threatened by arguments built on economic conditions, comparison of intellectual attributes, in sum, by arguments which imprison, oppress, and ignore one's desire to be, and by decreeing that one cannot be what he is not.

It is on the moves that de-animalise and restores men's capacity to take decisions, to plan liberating actions from oppressive situations that I now focus in the rest of the analysis.

4.2 Identity of the free man

The *fate* community is the object of Pedro's constant struggle, a story that he began living years ago, one step at a time, because it would not have been possible otherwise. An obstinate to achieve, to

become, to be a professional, Pedro is aware that the identity he chose, wanted, and pursued demands overcoming several learning, financial, family and social challenges. He knows that belonging to a *fate* community does not depend exclusively on his wish but also his personal capacity, strengths, and the support of others. These requisites are his own tools in his pursuit of freedom.

In this part of the analysis I will present my argument that Pedro knows that his *life* identity plays a role in other people's opinion that he cannot achieve his aimed identity, that is, his desired *fate* identity. He knows, from own experience, that rewarding feelings are connected to achievement and its recognition. For these reasons, all efforts in his struggle for the desired identity portray him as a *free man*.

All liberating moves from oppressive situations in which Pedro saw himself began in him and represented personal progress as his efforts were worth taking and the needs which he expressed found the necessary support for him to keep striving to make his plan come true.

The following diary excerpts illustrate the grounds of my assertions and give the reader access to aspects of Pedro's life story on which I shall not focus. They are part of the background where one can imagine him in his moves of struggle for freedom.

I always believed I was incapable of learning or else that was what they made me think. Until music came to my life. In the beginning, I told my mother that I wanted to play [name of instrument omitted], she laughed at me and said, 'all right'; but there was something in that 'all right', an undertone of 'not you, my son!' My father said, 'what for?' [Pedro, 13.10.09].

Achievement in one type of learning gives Pedro another perception of himself in regard to his capacity:

It was really cool to see the faces of my acquaintances watching me play. Even my brother who began the course could not finish it [Pedro, 14.10.09].

After years dedicated to the learning of an art, that is, music, Pedro overlooks his family's expectations and amazes them with his achievement. This recognition is the reward that he enjoys, which changes his former perception of someone considered to be incapable into someone capable of achieving what he chose to do. Following this change of identity, Pedro joins a group where his performance capacity is needed. Displaying such a personal quality, however, would not be enough to sustain the satisfaction with his identity⁴,

⁴ By analogy, Pedro's performance-related identity at the church is similar to Bauman's example of a cloakroom community identity. As he put it then, "cloakroom communities are patched together for the duration of the spectacle and promptly dismantled again once the spectators collect their coats from the hooks in the cloakroom" (p. 31).

considering that this is constituted by other identities in other spheres. For this reason, Pedro's identity of someone capable is threatened by perceptions and interactions in other contexts of his existence. It converges with Bauman (2004)'s idea that identity is not secured for life, it is not stable, but volatile, temporary. The following excerpt illustrates this interpretation:

The year was over and I finished High school. I worked a lot, earned little money, and played [name of instrument omitted] at the church. That was my life. *I had a year with no expectancies.* [...] my father [...] always *compared* me with my brothers. One was attending *university* and worked, the other was approved *in a public contest for a job*; the youngest was finishing High school. *I realised I was stuck in time, but time did not stop for me* [Pedro, 14.10.09].

Struggle for freedom, as memorably put by Freire, demands change of the role of viewer into the role of agent. This diary excerpt has both the literal and metaphorical meanings of Pedro's need of changing his reality:

One evening, I can't remember which, while watching soap opera, seeing the life of each character, *I felt an enormous need to fight for an objective; to be in a place other than the couch watching other people's life and letting mine pass by* [Pedro, 16.10.09].

The excerpt above reminds me of the idea that "individuals who were *submerged* in reality, merely *feeling* their needs, *emerge* from reality and perceive the *causes* of their needs" (Freire, 1968/1970: 110).

I thought about many professions but only one appealed to me: translator. I didn't even know what a translator did but when asked in which course I was trying to get a placement, *I would proudly say, Translator* [Pedro, 16.10.09].

The desire to "be more" (Freire, 1968/1970: 100) demands that Pedro, by means of action, surmount barriers that put him away from his goal; it requires his responsibility also in the sense of not abandoning the identity that he aspired for himself. In the next three excerpts I highlight Pedro's actions to meet his needs, overcome difficulties and hindrances, and create a learning opportunity:

I began a private course of English without my parents' help. My father said that he would not spend money on me. *So I began working as a waiter* at weekends. In the middle of the year I got to know that there would be a preparatory course for university exams. [To take the preparatory course] I had to sit for an exam and I *did*. Out of 183 people running for 50 placements in the course, I got the 183rd position [Pedro, 17.10.09].

I did not make it to the preparatory course *but I began to study by myself everyday – mornings, afternoons, and evenings*. My father

would never miss the chance to say, 'you won't make it' [Pedro, 17.10.09].

My English teacher moved to another city and I was left with no classes. He had taught me for 8 months. It was then that I *remembered* my teacher, that who helped me a lot. I *told* her about *my wish to take the university course in translation and I asked for her help*. Even undergoing a risky pregnancy, she would give me private lessons and teach me [Pedro, 18.10.09].

Besides daily study, Pedro's resources to gain sufficient knowledge to get a placement in the preparatory course for university entrance exams are time and work. However, not only does personal effort secure him sufficient condition to learn but the help of a teacher of his past, someone in whose action I recognise humanising qualities:

We only had three teachers and one of them was the one who touched us the most. *We could see she would give her blood to help us, her concern with us, the way she treated us. She taught me a lot of things* [Pedro, 07.10.09].

Nobody would give a damn to that class of low achieving students, *except for our teacher* [Pedro, 09.10.09].

Throughout the years, Pedro continues his struggle to get a placement in the preparatory course for university exams. He changes his study schedule, and - without taking the preparatory course - sits for and fails three university entrance exams. Pedro is not defeated by difficulty. When he recalls his life story, his language depicts him in the position of the agent of action:

I began another year taking private lessons, studying by myself, and working as a waiter at weekends [Pedro, 19.10.09].

In February *I began working* in the afternoon. In the morning *I studied* and at night *I attended* a paid prep course in another city. It was then that I was told about the State University of Londrina [...] *I filled in the forms* to take the exam at [name of university omitted] and for the first time at another university [Pedro, 21.10.09].

I saved money for my trip... [Pedro, 22.10.09].

Pedro's constant struggle to change his reality and, thus, his identity, implies fighting the oppressive consciousness. As Freire (1968/1970: 33) explains:

The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being. They discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet, although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized. The conflict lies in the voice between being wholly themselves or being divided [...] between following prescriptions or

having choices; between being spectators or actors [...] between speaking out or being silent...

In his struggle for identity, Pedro endures external expectations of his failure and a reality projected by others as very unlikely and by all means denied by economic impossibility. That is how I interpret the following excerpts:

...my father would always repeat, *you'll never make it*. My mother would not say a thing and keep her opinion to herself [Pedro, 19.10.09].

[...] once more my mother warned me: *if, by miracle, I were approved [in the university entrance exam], how would I afford my living? She made it clear that we had no resources for that [...]* [Pedro, 23.10.09].

One concrete step towards the desired identity – i.e. approval in the university entrance exam - is a reward for Pedro's quest, which he savours not only privately but also publicly:

It was *bewilderment for everybody*. Many people gave me compliments. My father did not say a word for a few days till he *gave me compliments*. My mother became worried [Pedro, 24.10.09].

The struggle for freedom reaches the first year of the university course, a year that Pedro experiences not without difficulties, not without deprivation, not without perception of the differences which are part of a new *life* community and of the differences between this and other communities. I highlight these ideas in the following excerpts:

I arrived in Londrina a month before the beginning of the classes [...] *money began to shrink. I went through tough days* until I got a job [...] *I worked the whole day [...] and went straight away to the university; I did not have time to study; I had one day off work per week and I ate badly* [Pedro, 25.10.09].

This year, *I had many difficulties*, left the job [...] because *it was not possible to combine work and study*. Then the opportunity came to get a student dorm at the university [Pedro, 26.10.09].

...I always *thought I had good knowledge of English. I realised I did not when I met my classmates. All of them already spoke English. Most of them are teachers and others have spent quite some time in the United States* [Pedro, 26.10.09].

At university *I noticed a lot of difference* compared to a school. Such is the difference that I still notice it nowadays. [University] *teachers do not chase students. It's the students who chase teachers. The university assumes that I already know or should know certain things* [Pedro, 27.10.09].

Today I do not need to work. I have the whole week to study but I still have a lot of difficulty in some disciplines. I study English during

the day [...] and go to the university in the evening [Pedro, 28.10.09].

To conclude this analysis of the *free man* identity, I bring in the following diary entry. Pedro's identity, which is unfinished because it is constantly being struggled for, depends – as his life story tells me – mainly on his individual responsibility. It also becomes feasible with institutional support and, especially, with the support of experienced others:

I got a scholarship to participate in a research project and I see many interesting topics. I have support of other students and mainly of my adviser, the one who asked me to write about my whole learning life [Pedro, 28.10.09].

5. Conclusion

Caring or being-for is a kind of responsibility that is prevoluntary, unremovable, non-contractual, nonreciprocal, and asymmetrical (Schwandt, 2003:205).

In this case study, drawing on stories written on a diary, I focused on the identity construction of a young undergraduate. The diary writing task could be equated to reality decoding. It enables diary keepers to develop "perception of their previous perception" and "knowledge of the previous knowledge" and in this process it stimulates the "appearance of a new perception and the development of new knowledge" (Freire, 1968/1970: 108). For this reason, in this study, the diary writing is closely related to the types of identities and their contents, the contexts of such identities, and their underlying ontologies.

As I explained earlier, I adopted concepts that postulate the struggle for identity as an intangible - because never stable and finished - (Bauman, 2004) and incessant task (Freire, 1968/1970). I also adhered to Freire (1968/1970)'s concepts of *freedom* and *oppression*, and I presented two types of community in Pedro's stories: *life* and *fate* communities. In regard to the former community, I centred my analysis on the identity of the *oppressed*; in the latter, on that of the *free man*.

Although phases of Pedro's life are marked in the past, they leave their features in his identity under construction. Time, people, places and he himself, Pedro, write stories which alternate between lines of oppression and struggle for freedom. For Freire (1968/1970), while oppression devours freedom, the struggle for the latter only exists because of the former. Thus, in between lines of oppression and freedom, the desire of transformation constantly renews this person who struggles for identity.

Pedro's diary text is both a window to his thinking and its own transformation. By writing it, he transforms himself, just as he

transforms the text of his life and temporarily redefines and (re)constructs the lines of his identity. While reconstructing his text, I am aware that in this subjective exercise I transform the text with my language just as the text transforms my language and, thus, me.

As I take into account Pedro (*the other*) and his trajectory, I vicariously live the phases of his life marked by the actions of the *teacher*, the *teachers*, the *principal*, the *parents*, the *siblings*. I live the actions of them *all*. To the extent that readers can question moral truths about themselves and be encouraged to take critical actions, I think this allegory will have been an empowering instrument and means to value what distinguishes us from objects: humanity.

I kept the first entry of Pedro's diary for the conclusion of this paper:

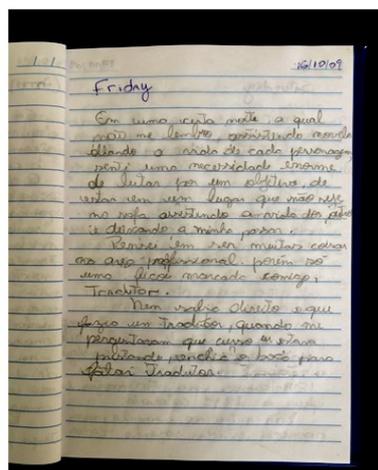
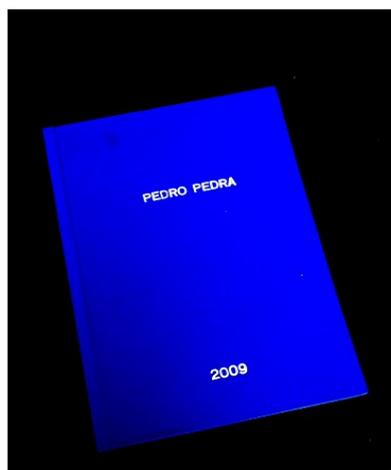
Today, with the incentive of my adviser, Simone Reis, I begin my diary because *I joined* the 'Critical Literacy' project with the *objective of developing myself as a person and a teacher, of having a more critical view on any topic and becoming a researcher*. In this diary I will write about my schooling experiences throughout my life until today [Pedro, 29.09.09].

The diary entries do not explain how or why Pedro⁵ changes from his former objective of being a *translator* into being a *teacher* and *researcher*. This, nonetheless, has less relevance than the desire *to be* since this desire surmounts denials of possibility of aimed realities and identities.

I originally wrote this paper in Portuguese in 2010. Upon invitation by one of the editors of an issue of the 'Critical Literacies: Theory and Practice' journal, I submitted it in English for publication. Even though the paper was immediately accepted, I decided to withdraw it from the publication on August 4th, 2010, and only have it published after Pedro's conclusion of his undergraduate course.

For an ontological, epistemological and ethical coherence, manuscripts should not be rushed into the publication industry for the sake of productivism. My choice was to respect the person who takes the leading role in this manuscript. Pedro began teaching English a couple of years before his graduation in the academic year of 2016. In October 2017, I asked him, once again, for his consent to publish the paper, which now ends with these two additional paragraphs (and photos of his diary). He gave me his consent and said he will always be within my reach for support. In the remote past, when I returned Pedro his diary, he asked me to keep it, and so have I.

⁵ Pedro has been teaching English in public schools.



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