Everyday Life and Public Elementary School in Brazil: A Critical Psychological Intervention Model

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Abstract

Brazil has one of the highest levels of economic disparity in the world. The educational system plays a large role in this reality, acting as a mechanism of social exclusion. Neoliberalism has resulted in the commodification of education, empowering private schools while undermining the public system. This has created a vicious cycle, whereby educational inequality reflects and reinforces social inequality. Such a system violates the rights of children not lucky enough to be born into wealth – the right to equal education; to equal opportunity; and equal treatment. From within this context, we propose a model, dubbed The Eagle's Flight, for psychological intervention in public schools. This will form an extension of our research group's Psychosocial Assessment and Intervention – Prevention, Community and Liberation, which has been an on-going project for the past fourteen years. The intervention model advocates monitoring child development from a critical, social and historical perspective, focusing on how school and community affect everyday life. The analysis will be carried out via the daily immersion of psychologists in the public school setting, who pay attention to key aspects which include various expressions of violence, financial difficulties related to unemployment, informal employment or drug dealing, poor access to health services, and the developmental impact of factors such as poverty. Based on Paulo Freire's Emancipatory Education Proposal and Ignacio Martín-Baró's Liberation Psychology, intervention in school and community must be an interdisciplinary procedure, employing professionals from a range of disciplines involved in the study of child development. The various subjects' perspectives seek to provide support for everyday problems and solutions, whilst breaking down the hegemonic model of psychological practice that considers the child and family as responsible for their problems. A concrete example of this critical psychosocial intervention model is presented.

Initial Considerations

The significance of everyday life is often understated, but it is in the day-to-day activities in which we can identify the themes and dynamics that have the greatest impact on the trajectory of history. Indeed, unless facts and ideas are integrated into everyday life, they

often have little impact. However, we have the ability to positively affect our societies by understanding which components are central to these dynamics, and changing them for the better. The study of everyday life is central to psychology, as it provides an intermediate link between society and the individual; between historical context and the components of a particular time and space. It is also the intersection of individual capacity and circumstantial restriction. Our concern lies with everyday life for two core reasons. Firstly, it is the space where social inequality is produced, normalized, and justified (Jost & Hunyady, 2002). As Kosik (1976) states, daily individual activity is not neutral – it is a projection of the aspirations and interests of a specific social class. The normativity of this inequality renders it invisible (Kahneman & Miller, 1986). Therein rests our second concern: that naturalized inequality will be embedded in developmental processes, widening the gap – psychologically and financially – between those with privilege and those without. *Everydayness* creates an environment conducive to land alienation due to spontaneous assimilation of constitutive dominant norms. We differentiate here *everydayness* from everyday life that, according to Lefebvre (1979), is natural for capitalist life's reproduction implying the characteristics of the generic mode of life actions. Thus, we can see how the economic structure of a society, carried out in our everyday lives, radiates into all spheres of existence by producing alienation (Kosik, 1976).

Under conditions of social inequality we understand that people are born into various different social groups, in which gender, social class, ethnicity, or any other arbitrary conditions convey different expectations in terms of what is necessary for one to learn and develop. It is these social norms that moderate the choices we are able to make day-to-day (Burman, 1996). Taught by cultural institutions, such as family and school, the customs, norms and ethics of the group – the patterns that embody their social position – are reinforced. People operate in everyday life as natural beings seeking to meet particular need.

This project has two focus questions: What social norms are being constructed and transmitted by these institutions, given their limitations? And how does the context of the Brazilian public education affect child development? To provide some context, we illustrate how Brazilian society is organized, the political discourses behind education, and the consequences of so-called economic and social improvements to date (Pochmann, 2012).

Within these problematic norms and discourses a central feature of everyday life can be identified: The articulation of people as unique, singular and particular instead of linking their action and thought to mankind. Lukács (1966) claims that beyond its immediacy and its spontaneity, everyday life makes us always deal with the appearances of the emerging demands, which prevents us from go beyond the narrower dimension of everyday life toward what belongs to the more generic dimension of being human. This characteristic is established in constant tension with the possibilities of change, which can only be realized by the people's effective action in the world – as objectification that is in constant transformation.

Brazilian Social Life and Public Policies affecting Education: A Fundamentally Mercantile Perspective

According to the SAE (2013), there has been a decrease in the proportion of the lower socio-economic system (lower class or 'poor') and an increase in the so-called middle

class in Brazil. Labelling this class as a new middle class has been criticized because of the difficulties these people face, including living with enormous social inequality. Despite increases in the Human Development Index and the population's overall average life quality, access to and quality of basic public services, such as education, health and transport, is in decline from year to year. Identifying the growing working class as a new middle class is a mistake, and is due to misconceptions in public policy that are designed to stimulate consumption. This interpretation of the new middle class reorients public policies to a mercantile perspective. That is to say, it results in a strengthening of private health care plans, education, assistance and welfare, among others. It has not resulted in the improvement of the population's everyday lives. What has occurred is a progressive increase of people's debt, as greater access to credit facilitates consumerism. Simultaneously, it has resulted in the devaluation of public services, such as public health systems, education and welfare (Guzzo, Marçal & Rybka, 2013). This social abyss constitutes the fundamental backdrop against which all children and adolescents develop, especially inside the public schools. The United Nations Program for the Development (UNDP/PNUD) report about Latin America and the Caribbean[1] classifies Brazil as the third most unequal nation in the world. This reality has serious implications for the everyday life of children and young people. It affects individual opportunities, future perspectives, and accomplishments. A cycle of poverty exists where the abyss between social groups is continuously widened, resulting in low social and educational mobility over generations. In this way, a perverse version of apartheid is reinforced under the aegis of the same nation. On the one hand, the upper classes have complete access to culture and the highest standard of education. On the other hand, people with no access to culture and education are forced to participate in their own subordination by necessity.

Public School: A Serious Situation

This dynamic puts public schooling in the precarious position of being under-resourced, over-worked, and struggling to provide quality education. Data on school completion and academic performance are appalling: only 51% of students finish high school, and among those who finish, only 29% are expected to pass exams in Portuguese and 10% in Mathematics (IBGE, 2013).

A majority of Brazilian children and youth attend public school at the basic level and, for them, these circumstances seriously impede their influence on their everyday realities. It impacts on their individual choice, their prospects for the future, and fulfilment as human beings. Brazilian research in the field of School Psychology has already reported on the relation between this precariousness and the children's developmental process inside the schools (Patto, 1984; 1996; 1997; Marinho-Araújo & Almeida, 2005; Guzzo, Lacerda Jr. & Euzébios Filho, 2006; Martínez, 2007; Meira, 2007; Gomes & Souza, 2008; Guzzo, 2009; Marinho-Araújo, 2010; Moreira & Guzzo, 2014). The socio-economic gulf between Brazilian social classes is thus continually produced and reproduced in public school, resulting in lower social and educational mobility between generations. It thereby strengthens the above-mentioned version of social apartheid.

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[1] PNUD, 2013

Emancipatory Education and Liberation Psychology: challenges for social change

Psychology and Education as academic disciplines have limited possibilities for explaining and underpinning the transformation of society. In other words, they are not able to change the social order if building on purely individualistic perspectives. It is also necessary to break with the social order these two areas themselves reproduce. As Paulo Freire points out:

> If we look at the educational policies as a piece of global society and understand that these policies may change the ideological domains, we can avoid a kind of naive optimism. (Freire & Shor, 1987, p.158, own translation)

In this process, psychology plays an important role: as conscious beings we can recognize how much we are submitted to and conditioned by dominant ideology. Therefore, we need to 'learn to be free', knowing, on principle, about our lack of freedom in the contexts through which we develop. The rising process of awareness makes it possible, thus, to overcome and transform life-conditions. The need, increasingly pressing, of building a Psychology committed to forging Brazilian and Latin American reality, comes from an unveiling of the dominant ideology, which is the main function of a 'liberating curriculum' – understood here as a set of experiences and educational projects that promote students and teachers to exert criticism of reality (Freire & Shor, 1987).

Emancipatory Education

Understanding that education is an important process in the formation of the people makes us assume that, as a process, it can contribute to either emancipation or submission to the values and the functioning of society. This question intertwines Psychology and Education and gives them a political character. For Freire and Horton (2003) no reflection on education may ignore issues related to power, economy, justice, equality, freedom and ethics of social organization, i.e. the right to life. However, an effort must be made to clarify the process of emancipating through education and to what extent it can counter the current social structure, e.g. in Brazilian public schools. The question addressed here draws attention to the type of education undertaken in a number of public schools, perpetuating a teaching practice, which does not promote the development of autonomy. From an analysis of Freire's work (1973, 1979, 2000; Freire & Macedo, 1994) and reflecting on the importance of the process of education, it should allow the individual to live his/her own history in a realistic way, that means as a liberating process and not a domesticating one, i.e. one which aims at critique and autonomy and thereby breaks with the reproduction of the dominant ideology. In that way, consequently, education is to promote the following understandings:

1. *The importance of constantly reviewing emancipation as process*: In a capitalist society, more and more people are immersed in a mass culture that disables criticism. Therefore, an educational process that is to be liberating and emancipatory assumes a dissonant position. Who lives the emancipatory process always seems to be 'upstream', particularly as the citizen's profile, as stated in Montaño (2002), constitutes the social relations of

capitalism. This profile is consistent with the model of education that disables criticism and promotes submission.

2. *Exercising autonomy presupposes the freedom to create*: An authoritarian pedagogy or an authoritarian political regime does not allow for the necessary freedom to be creative. It requires the development of creativity to learn – arouse interest, motivate to discover, create spaces for new creations, as ways to promote emancipation and autonomy. Authoritarian education including authoritarian parenting, in contrast, produces dependence, fear and inability to create, to critique, and to exercise autonomy.

3. *Thinking about life, exercising reflection, questioning the arguments and arguing for decision making, are foundations of emancipation*: In spaces of domination and oppressive relations there is no possibility for freely expressing and exercising autonomy. The classroom that contributes to the emancipation, contrary to what has been understood by educators and psychologists, proposes to think about vital issues and write about them. For the emancipation we must exercise *acting* with independence and freedom, with rigor and persistence. We need to position ourselves faced with choices and argue before posing questions. We need to think and communicate. In authoritarian educational spaces students cannot live the satisfaction of thinking and taking positions – the student's intellectual work frightens the teachers and school represses via domestication.

4. *Everyday life in the real world constitutes possibilities and limits of any critical education*. Reality, as perceived and evaluated by the people, is the main element of the educational process. It is by means of a critical education that it can be rendered a known manner. Critical education cannot involve those who refuse to receive it. It is a process that requires awareness and individual membership.

5. *Liberating Education can illuminate relations of exploitation obscured by the ruling classes*. Through education we can understand society, illuminating the relations of exploitation that the ruling classes seek to obscure. The dominant forces seek, by all means, the maintenance of order so that nothing becomes, there are no conflicts or questions, so people accept without knowing, without questioning, without knowing their rights. The dominant forces therefore do not allow for the possible transformation of educational policy.

6. *In Liberating Education, both teachers and students become critical agents of the act of knowing*. From this educational process a naïve or a critical consciousness can emerge, and Liberating Education aims for transforming passive ingenuity to critical perception and understanding of reality. It is a process that modifies the way stakeholders perceive reality and interfere with it. Liberating Education should be committed to a time, a process or a practice in which people are encouraged to organize and mobilize to gain power, to exercise autonomy. It is a process in which both teachers and students are involved. Teaching and learning are part of the same dialogical and non-authoritarian process, and by enabling discovery and experience, they exercise the power to change the social circumstances and contradict the dominant ideology.

7. *The concrete changes of reality depend on political practices that require the mobilization and organization of people around common goals*. If there are no spaces where this emancipatory education can take place, especially in educational spaces, the domesticating education fulfils its role preventing a disturbance of the social order, thereby maintaining the status quo. The logic of domination is reproduced in school and in any other state institution. The fight against all forms of domination and the search for

coherence between knowledge and reality become emancipatory goals of the educational process.

By pointing out these elements, which need be present in the emancipatory education, it is worth reiterating the more critical awareness the educational process develops, the more participation is possible in social transformational actions. Through participation, it is possible to mobilize the masses, to combat exploitation and injustice, thus opting for material conditions that exceed the capitalist society. As Marx wrote in his sixth thesis on Feuerbach, "the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations" (Marx, n.d., p. 62). Thus, psychology cannot seek to understand the psychic only within the individuals, as the key to its understanding lies not in the individual (Sève, 1979). This statement is very important for understanding the relationship between Psychology and Education, between individual and society, between the collective and the individual in the constitution of the people and their social groups. It is not possible to omit the historical path in understanding the human essence assuming the individual as isolated from its context. Hence, it is impossible to pursue the relationship between psychology and education only by adopting a naturalized and widespread understanding of the persons merely in terms of their individual aspects, as if individuals were capable of understanding only by their biological, genetic and invariable characteristics.

Psychology, as discussed by Prilleltensky (1994), has moral and political repercussions on social life and vice versa. There is no way to deny this. These impacts affect life, both individually and collectively, and so it is important to bear in mind the relationship between psychological theory and the current state of society. It is against this backdrop that the *Flight of the Eagle Project* is developed within the school.

Liberation Psychology

When thinking a process of popular empowerment through education, seeking to fight oppression and injustice, we must consider the conditions that are present in neoliberal societies, dominated among other by values such as individualism and competitiveness, and where the school is an integral and essential part of this larger system. By understanding the human constitution from a historical perspective, it becomes important to analyse how relations shape the conditions in which people live: their needs, their freedom, their welfare, and their work. Dreams and desires of each one are formed by the social and material conditions of life. This leads to a critical position in relation to psychological knowledge and practice, especially knowledge and practice that focus on the individuals detached from their world and their relational processes.

When studying child development from a historical perspective, the need for understanding the social and material relations through which it develops emerges. How do we come to live the way we live today? We must understand the way that society has become what it is, know the historical elements of being human, not just the story of our lives, but especially how our everyday lives is relation to the history of civilization and social organizations. This is pivotal when wanting to understand the problems experienced by children within schools.

Dominant Psychology provides no concepts for a historical and social analysis of the human being. Rather, it promotes the representation of human beings as independent of ideology. For Ratner (1971), the individual needs context to create the content of thoughts

and actions, to generate a range of possibilities of thinking and acting among which s/he can choose. Marx and Engels (2002) said that by changing the relations of human life, their social relationships, their social existence, we can also change their representations, their conceptions and concepts; in short, we change our consciousness.

Hence, the individual does not exist without the reality that surrounds it, and if the reality changes, individuals change: they change consciousness about the world. Understanding, therefore, the structure and development of the human personality needs to take into account all its relations, which encompasses, according to Sève (1979), the psychological activity and the historical and social nature of personality. For this author, bourgeois ideology naturalizes the psychological activity and personality and in this sense, psychology, servicing this ideology, detaches activity and personality from reality. To discern the foundations of a historically concrete and revolutionary psychology, real life people should be understood in terms of the internalization of their political and social relations. This thesis reinforces the notion that spaces of authoritarian and oppressive relations favour the reproduction of violence and oppression. If psychology is at the service of the dominant ideology, it is necessary to work on breaking with the dominant political and social discourse, so one can be emancipated through a science geared to the true interests of the oppressed majority, as proposed by Ignacio Martín-Baró (1998).

The Psychology of Liberation aims to change reality founded on an ethic which, according to Dobles (2005), implies a principle of maintenance of human life, in its corporeality, in its specific characteristics and community, without neglecting structural factors and social order that influence situations of oppression, inequality and heteronomy. For Martín-Baró (1996), the uniqueness of the human being consists in the life s/he historically built through social relationships. Psychological health thereby fundamentally becomes a relational matter, a dynamic that defines the humanization opportunities for members of each society and group. The Psychology of Liberation, as Lykes (2000) argues, was developed by Martín-Baró and is grounded in his life and work among the poor and the elite of El Salvador throughout more than a decade of civil war. He emphasized that taking political positions is not a bias or interference in the production of knowledge, but an ethical choice, culminating in real action. The position taken by Martín-Baró, his research and his assassination in November 1989, are consequences of his involvement in the quest for social change. Psychology of Liberation, such as Martín-Baró (1996) characterized it, is a call to action, a challenge to develop the practice and the theory based on the experience of the communities with whom the psychologist works. Extreme situations, such as the author calls them, situations of extreme hardship, oppression, suffering, can become conditions for the development of a liberating awareness, which is critical and emancipatory. On these grounds, our proposal is that professional psychology should be implemented into school everyday life. By becoming part of daily living at the school, the psychologist can closely follow the historical and social experiences of children in process. This model provides an alternative way of understanding what happens to children, especially to those who fail in the school system, dropping out of school or facing everyday life problems.

A Psychologist And The School Routine

The integration of psychologists in Brazilian public schools is not yet legally determined nor a countrywide reality. The presence of these professionals in the educational teams is

only allowed by few municipal laws, or rendered possible via academic initiatives which design research interventions.

Our experience of public schools tells us that teachers, principals, pedagogical mentors, and families associate the role of psychologists with a diagnostic and curative function. Within the school boundaries, everyday questions particularly concern psychological diagnostics or clinical treatment. The psychological clinical discourse is indiscriminately transferred to the school setting, guided by the psychometric logic, destined to cure some individual suffering that disturbs the wellbeing of the society. By identifying students' individual problems, the school is able to refer them to health and social assistance services. Current systems require that students be referred to psychologists outside the school setting. Students will be evaluated individually and proposed appropriate therapy. Students return to school with reports and external psychological observation protocols, however, these evaluations have no impact on the school context. Furthermore, maintaining therapist-client contact is often crucial in the upkeep of constructive behaviour, but the current system does not allow for this. This indicates a misunderstanding of the purpose and process of psychology within the school community, which needs to be rectified if psychological intervention is to be effective. It also indicates the need to address the fact that the current system seeks to provide individual solutions to social problems and, thus, maintains the problems that it tries to overcome (Parker, 2007).

There is evidence supporting the need for school-based psychological interventions, which seeks to address the material and phenomenological experiences of students against prejudicial and stereotyped analysis. Meanwhile, much of the current work in this area limits itself to a reductionist and individualistic view of social phenomena. Given the multitude of factors we have already discussed – economics, violence, access to cultural activities, and quality of education, just to name a few – it is necessary to develop an approach that is willing to consider all sides of the issue (Sant'Ana, Costa & Guzzo, 2008; Guzzo, Costa & Sant'Ana, 2009; Weber, 2009; Guzzo, Moreira & Mezzalira, 2011; Mezzalira & Guzzo, 2011; Guzzo, Mezzalira & Moreira, 2012).

Professional psychologists have made an effort to cultivate an understanding of these issues within schools and communities. Their campaign advocates for the presence of psychologists in schools in order to work towards child development on a daily basis. However, the national education plan for 2010/2020 indicates that only 50% of all Brazilian primary schools are obliged to have a full time psychological professional involved. We believe that, until universal psychological care is mandatory in schools, we will not be able to fully comprehend the extent of child development problems, let alone be able to address them. Given the scale of social problems in Brazil, it is necessary that our efforts to rectify these issues are just as intensive. We recommend that psychologists and teachers work cooperatively on a daily basis to monitor child development, preventing problems and ensuring better conditions for learning and socio-emotional development.

As mentioned, in order to ascertain the origin of psychological issues in students, the psychological clinical practice has historically been employed indiscriminately in school, implementing therapy guided by quantitative research (Patto, 1997). The subtle effects of engendering an unequal relationship between 'expert' and 'patient' have caused a methodological confusion. This diagnostic and remedial posture often obscures, avoids or fails to consider alternative, critically positioned interventions (Moysés & Collares, 1997). Critical positions are integral to the scientific process and can provide a constructive

insight into the strengths and deficits of our methodologies. From this vantage point, the intervention-action proposals in educational spaces curb the imperative of logic of individualizing all social problems and the imperative of uncritical methods.

The predominance of a remedial-curative model on the one hand, and the absence of a critical methodological alternative on the other, creates an environment that serves a variety of different (and complementary) functions: preservation of ideas necessary to maintain an economic and social system based on the rule of capital; the continuing fragmentation of psychological knowledge, whose consolidation is upheld by this same system; and the promotion of the remedial or curative principle within the school (Parker, 2007)

A Proposal For Action – The *Eagle's Flight Project*

As psychologists intending to participate in a transformative and radical perspective founded upon an emancipatory education and liberation psychology, we seek to develop intervention proposals as part of the school environment. These are to enable a practice that is consistent with our principles and, we believe, able to produce revolutionary change. Since 2000, we have been working with public educational institutions with an extension project named "Preventive Intervention in Schools and Communities: The Eagle's Flight Project".[2] The project introduces a psychologist into the school routine, whose task is to translate everyday student experiences into scientific thought. The psychologist must be attentive to the children, educators, families, management, and pedagogical teams. S/he is to initiate collective deliberation within the school and across educational policy-making.

This proposal is also founded on the framework of psychosocial intervention (Montañez, Bernal, Heredia & Puerto, 2007) and is designed to promote and attend to the emotional and social development of students in the school environment, with an end goal focused on alleviating all impediments to healthy development. The objective of the project is to understand the context behind behaviours presented in the school environment. One cannot divorce educational problems from the political, economic and social tumult of Brazil. Our goal is to stand beside the children who grow up in exclusionary and unequal contexts and, rather than force them to conform to a standard, try to look at their reality together with them. By participating in their everyday lives and trying to understand their needs and wants, their conflicts, their joys, their sorrows, more generally their childhood, we believe we will find most of the answers to how to best assist them.

Following these considerations, the psychologist within the school must implement an intervention that taps into the objective and subjective conditions of the students. The intervention will avoid reductionist, individualistic tropes so common to mainstream practice, instead focusing on broader, context-bound measures, enabling a revolutionary praxis and thus modifying reality (Heller, 2004; Oliveira, 2005; Konder, 2009).

Since the year 2000, *The Eagle's Flight Project* has been implemented in public institutions at preschool and elementary school levels (from 1 to 15 years of age),

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[2] This project has been developed from within the Primary Mental Health Program created by the Child's Institute at Rochester University, N. Y. (Cowen, Hightower, Pedro-Carol, Work, Wyman & Haffey, 1996; Johnson, 2002; Sant'Ana, Costa & Guzzo, 2008; and Costa, 2010)

promoting social and emotional wellbeing. This project, in its mode of intervention, seeks to understand reasons beyond the apparent behaviours manifest in school spaces. For this purpose, we developed a psychosocial analysis that involves the child, school, family and the public service bodies for children and adolescents, always relating the problems to the political, economic and social situation of our country.

The Sarita Case – *"The child is like a plant"*

In order to demonstrate how our model works in practice, we present a case study of one intervention. This intervention revolved around Sarita,[3] a 9-year-old girl who attends a public elementary school in Campinas. Teachers pointed Sarita out to the in-school psychologist, because she presented verbal communication difficulties with peers and adults in school. The child was very quiet, never talking to the other children or the teacher. She only communicated through gestures and interacted with two other female students in the special education program. Her communication with the teacher was limited to written notes. On the other hand, she loved drawing and engaging in other activities at school, like watching movies or playing. When selecting children and adults to interact with, she chose those who wanted to interact non-verbally. Sarita's mother suffered from the end of her first marriage to Sarita's father, who abandoned the family and did not fulfil his obligations to support his daughter. Her mother reported that she was not literate, the family had a very hard life, and that she needs to work and maintain the household to ensure that Sarita could study. The teacher suspected that the silence was a result of abuse or neglect, and suggested that the school should forward this case to the responsible legal body.

The professional psychologist as part of the collaborative, partly academic *Eagle's Flight* team challenged the notion of delegating the issue to an external institution, as the symptoms manifested themselves inside the institution. Our team proposed an alternative strategy: that it would be better for us to investigate her relations with her family. We started listening to the school guard, who has a very close relationship with the kids and the community. He told us he always walked around the family's house and that for him, *the child was like a plant: apathetic and quiet; always outside the home*. We visited the family at their home, where Sarita ate and slept. She lived with her mother, stepfather, and younger brother. There was a bedroom, a bathroom, and a kitchen in the house. The mother, stepfather, and brother slept in the bedroom and she in a bed inside the kitchen. According to the mother, Sarita was really quiet and never spoke spontaneously. She also said that the family did not use to talk to each other and she was not used to speaking with her daughter. The mother did not understand her daughter's behaviour as a problem: She affirmed that her daughter was shy and did not speak with everybody, but that as a girl this is not worrisome, as girls need to be careful and better not talk to people they don't know well. The mother also told us that she had learned that the most important thing for a child in the school was to learn how to carry out the school's learning tasks. Subsequently we talked to the mother about the skills involved in carrying out these tasks. We made a deal that she would attempt to get closer to Sarita, strengthening the bond so the daughter would feel confident to speak up and to be listened to. We also became better acquainted with the family and gave them the opportunity to get to know the school.

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[3] This name is fictitious.

These actions changed the teacher's proposal to refer Sarita to the Child Protection Council (Souza, Teixeira & Silva, 2003), based on the assumption that Sarita could have problems at home, possibly due to domestic violence. Initially the pedagogical advisor – member of school staff – consulted our psychological team about whether we agreed with the referral. As pointed out, we communicated that, in our view, a referral to the Child Protection Council may present problems, as the school had no knowledge about the child problem's origin or dynamic. We suggested taking investigative actions from within the school, in cooperation with the family, expecting this would be best to protect the child from the impact of a possible unsubstantiated complaint. We know that, in cases like this, it is not unusual that the family (further) coerces the child when accused by the Child Protection Council. Caution should also guide us while assumptions raised are clarified. The pedagogic advisor heeded our suggestion and, together with the teachers, instigated investigations of the dynamics potentially related to this situation. Such an intervention broke with traditional approaches where suspicion is followed by referral to agencies outside the school context, without further consideration. Instead, the school planned a visit to the family home. This visit was an important milestone for furthering collaboration between teachers, family, pedagogical advisor and psychologists.

The Psychology Team's Detailed Actions

The psychology team participated in classroom activities on a weekly basis, with the objective of building an affective bond with the child. During these periods, we attempted to interact with Sarita and her only friend in the classroom. At the beginning, she was resistant, however, she soon began responding to our questions with gestures, and finally via verbal communication. During these dialogues, if someone got closer, she would stop talking – she never spoke in the presence of someone she didn't trust. Trust was crucial for this child to comfortably speak up. The psychology team analysed the relationships with some of Sarita's teachers and discovered a theme of intimidation. For example, she would be threatened if she did not answer to questions or the roll call. When these teachers called for her attention, Sarita became quiet. She was clearly afraid of becoming vulnerable when verbally exposing herself in front of other people.

Our strategy to approach the family was to visit the family's house together with the psychologist and a familiar schoolteacher. The visit was an important event for establishing productive contact between all three parties. The different points of view raised many vital issues, central to understanding Sarita's development. The visit also facilitated developing action plans for school. Thereby the teacher's unsettling conduct in the classroom could be addressed. The teacher began proposing activities to stimulate the collective and cooperative participation of the children instead.

Aiming to build an emotional bond with the children, the entire psychological team participated in weekly classroom activities. In particular we sought interaction with Sarita, for instance through actively involving one of the friends with whom Sarita talked. Initially Sarita refused to communicate with us, but a few days later, she began to interact by answering our questions via gestures, until later verbal communication was initiated. During these meetings, we began to understand and increasingly explore Sarita's feelings. She started talking a lot by herself: Many questions needed not be asked anymore for stimulating her speech. However, when asked why she did not talk to certain people she replied: "why, yes". This seemed to be something natural, to select whether or not to talk.

Furthermore, the family visit justified subsidies for action plans within the school. These involved the participation of a trainee psychologist in the classroom, in order to build a bond with Sarita and her peers and change the teachers' conduct, instigating cooperative classroom participation. As a result of these interventions, we found that Sarita made significant advances, which affected her social relationships during the year. Such advances could be observed, for example, in her growing circle of friends and the fact that she began to answer the roll call.

This different model of professional action pointed to many pivotal aspects for the psychologist intervention, but also integral to understanding the process of child development. The below table summarizes differences of understanding development in relation to the curative psychological referral model and the emancipatory *Eagle's Flight* model:

Table 1: The different Models for professional actions in Schools

MAINSTREAM **Curative psychological referral model**	The EAGLE FLIGHT Project **Psychosocial Preventive Intervention**
The psychologist is not integrated into the school setting.	The psychologist is integrated into the school setting.
The school identifies troublemakers and problematical situations.	The school accompanies the students' psychosocial development and the relationships established in the school environment.
The school refers to health and social assistance services. They deliver reports and individual treatment, based on quantitative psychological research.	The school reorganizes its practices, developing internal strategies and solutions.

Differences between psychological school intervention models: From abstract referral to emancipation and liberation

The investigative actions and interventions protected the child from the impacts of an unnecessary complaint and referral. This is particularly important because we know that, in cases like this one, it is not uncommon to see the family, threatened by a legal body, coerce the child even more. The process also clarified the alleged abuse, maltreatment or neglect hypotheses that were initially formulated.

This underlines that the standard code of conduct, i.e. schools' referrals of supposedly individual problem students to external psychological institutions, is less advantageous. Instead, a psychosocial approach can be employed, which builds on observation and familiarity of the psychological team and educational staff to judge what is best for Sarita's and other children's development.

In this case, we are able to demonstrate the capacity of a skilled psychological team to identify relevant aspects that affect a child's development. The careful analysis of important contexts, such as relationships or environmental factors, is integral to constructively addressing a child's developmental problems without individualizing them. In this way, it is possible to develop, together with the stakeholders, strategies for overcoming child and school limitations in the emancipatory perspective of a liberating education. At the same time it demonstrates how a critical intervention can change the school routine and improve the possibility to improve the child's wellbeing in school.

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