

■ WILLIAM SOARES DOS SANTOS

NARRATION AND DIALOGUE IN DANILO DOLCI AND PAULO FREIRE

Narrative is a very particular type of discourse. It has a specific structure and it is used, mainly, as a way of recapitulation of past experiences^{1 2 3}. I will not have time to explore all its complexities, but it is important, for our purpose here, to say that the narrative discourse has a lot of impact in our everyday lives because, among other elements, it carries within multiple meanings related not only to the moment of the narration itself and to its theme, but also connected to who we are and the identity constructions we make of ourselves and of those around us.

Bastos and Santos⁴, writing about the narratives in interviews, observe that in dealing with narratives, the interviewees should not be seen just as a source of information for a specific research, but as someone who constructs, through the narrative process, a discourse about something important to his or her existence. In a previous research⁵, I have demonstrated how narrative is a power tool used by converted people to discursively construct their attachment to new religious principles, but it is also a very strong tool to implement democratic practices of education since,

1 W. Labov and J. Waletzky, *Narrative Analysis: oral versions of personal experience*, In *Essays on the verbal and visual arts*, University of Washington Press, Seattle/Washington 1967, pp. 123-144.

2 W. Labov, *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Pennsylvania 1972.

3 L.C. Bastos, *Contando estórias em contextos espontâneos e institucionais – uma introdução ao estudo da narrativa*, In “Caleidoscópio” Vol 3, n. 2., Ed. Unisinos, 2005, pp. 74-87.

4 L.C. Bastos and W. S. dos Santos, *Caramba, e eu era assim, pelo amor de Deus” – a perspectiva do presente na reconstrução identitária em narrativas de conversão religiosa*, In I. Magalhães, M. Grigoletto and M.J. Coracine (Orgs) *Práticas Identitárias: Língua e Discurso*, Claraluz, São Carlos 2006, pp. 223-234.

5 W.S dos Santos, *O longo Caminho até Damasco: rede de mudança e fluxo de mudança em narrativas de conversão religiosa*. Tese de Doutorado. PUC-Rio. 2007.

as Charlotte Linde⁶ observes, we make coherence of our world through the use of narratives.

The aspect of the narrative discourse I'm most concerned with here is what Jerome Bruner⁷ calls the narrative principle in education. It refers to the development of ways of thinking and feeling that help children (and people in general) to develop a version of the world in which they can build a place for themselves. Reviewing the way of dealing with the educational process of both Paulo Freire and Danilo Dolci, it is clear that they incorporated this principle in their works. Both of them also applied in their works the principle studied by John L. Austin⁸, which understands that in developing discourse, we are producing changes in the social world. Margaretha Järvinen⁹ also calls attention to the fact that it is important to understand the narratives as a discourse which is profound related to the issues of the present existence of the narrator. According to Järvinen, "this theoretical approach presents an alternative to both subjectivist approaches, that continue the search for the solitary, true self behind the life histories, and to structuralist approaches, in which the self and its past experience disappears". Also, according to Järvinen, when we investigate narratives in their social aspect, we can focus on the perspective of the present without losing sight of the past and emphasizing the interactionist dimensions of life histories, paying attention to the people and their ongoing projects. This perspective also echoes the viewpoints about narrative discourse developed by Paul Ricoeur¹⁰.

For Bruner, the educator must present the disciplinary contents with an intuitive account that is perceptible to the student, returning to the subject later with a more complex report, reviewing the subject as many times as necessary until the student fully grasps the subject. In this way, it is possible to teach honestly to any child (or adult) over all areas of knowledge using a narrative perspective. It is through the use of language that the student understands the connections between his/her daily life

6 C. Linde, *Life Stories – The Creation of Coherence*, Oxford University Press, New York 1993.

7 J. Bruner, *Acts of meaning*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1990.

8 J.L Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, Oxford University Press, London 1962.

9 M. Järvinen, *Life Histories and the Perspective of the Present*, In "Narrative Inquiry", 14(1), John Benjamins, Amsterdam 2004, pp.45-68.

10 P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Vol. 1), University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1984.

and perceives the connections of the language of the common sense with the scientific language, for instance. Bruner concluded that knowledge becomes more appropriate when the learner discovers it through their own cognitive efforts. Thus, the new knowledge is related to what was previously known, no matter how difficult it is to understand the area addressed, it can be represented in simpler ways, making it more accessible to the student. Discourse (and particularly narrative discourse), being one of the main tools used by the teacher, plays a fundamental role to help in the understanding between teachers and students. Giusy Randazzo¹¹, in his article about a particular kind of methodology involving narratives (based in Danilo Dolci's methodology), says that it

highlights the instrumental and enriching value, which allows to create a space and a time in which everyone has the privilege - so it now seems in this society - to be freely himself, to show the power of his own resources in the community and to draw on from the mutual comparison also to the resources of the other. An ethic in which building together everyone builds better and learns to learn¹².

One of the common grounds between the works of Paulo Freire and Danilo Dolci was that the societies in which they lived and produced, in the twentieth century, were basically formed by few riches and a great mass of poor people who strive to live around the centres where feeble forms of capitalism were emerging. Let's see each of their works separately to have a better glimpse how they use narrative discourse in order to construct their educational process.

PAULO FREIRE AND THE USE OF NARRATIVE DISCOURSE IN EDUCATION

Throughout his work as a teacher, Paulo Freire perceived the many forms in which great part of the people of poor cities in Brazil were subjugated

11 G. Randazzo, *Per una scuola democratica: la dialettica del dialogo: metodologia della Narrazione e della Riflessione*, in "Educazione Democratica", 2, 2011, p.216.

12 "(...) mette in evidenza il valore strumentale e arricchente, che permette di creare uno spazio e un tempo in cui ognuno ha il privilegio – così sembra ormai in questa società – di essere liberamente se stesso, di mostrare in comunità il potere delle proprie risorse e di attingere dal confronto reciproco anche alle risorse dell'altro. Un'etica in cui costruendo insieme si costruisce meglio e s'impara ad apprendere".

and we can say, following the perception he constructed, that their suffering, their poorness, their limited mindset made them oppressed people. So, discussing the influence of oppression in the lives of the people who strived to survive in that difficult environment was one of his prior researches in the years to come.

Paulo Freire started to work as a teacher while he was still a student at high school. He received a scholarship to study in a private institution and in return started working as an assistant teacher. But it was his direct contact with poor and illiterate people, that gave him the opportunity to think about the educational process in another level than the simple transmission of knowledge. He considered that the education is an important toll in the process of freedom.

In the core of the educational experience of Paulo Freire was the pursue of a “New Society”, as he wrote in his book *The importance of the act of reading (A importância do ato de ler)*, this society would be without any kind of exploitation. It would be a place in which no men nor woman, nor any class would exploit the work force of any other human being. It is a society in which there is no privilege to those who work with pen regarding to those who work in factories or in farms. Everybody would be considered a worker in the service of the common wellbeing.

Concerned with the illiteracy of a huge number of adults in Brazil, Paulo Freire developed a method (known as “método Paulo Freire” or, in English “Paulo Freire’s method”) to teach adults to read and write. His method started from the simple premise that people would be more interested and able to learn reading and writing with words of their own world. Thus, Paulo Freire and his group, before beginning the classes, made a research to know the community, the works people were involved in and the words the people used in their daily lives. From this research they would develop a material to start their work. He firstly used the methodology in his work as a teacher in his hometown, Recife, but it was only in 1962 that he had the opportunity to put his method in practice in a larger scale. It was in the city of Angicos, in an experience that entered to History as “the 40 hours of Angicos” because he and his group of teachers, by applying his method, were able to teach 300 hundred people (all of them from the working class) to read and write in forty hours of lessons. Angicos is an inner city in the “sertão” (draught areas) of the State

of Rio Grande do Norte, at the northeast region of Brazil. In the process of applying his methodology, the narrative was a central element of education. Paulo Freire and his group not only brought letters and words to be learned, but they implemented the production of narratives of story lives in their classes. Narrating their stories, people could perceive how their illiteracy made their positions very restrict in the world they lived. The reality them was rash and the indices of alliteration was very high. Unable to perceive that a development in education can bring also an economic development, the local elite at the time called the process as “the communist plague”. In a similar way, in some places of Brazil (even today) many projects of social transformation are labelled by the local elites as communist or any equivalent label that can represent the expression of threat to their stablished *status quo*. But the process developed by Paulo Freire in his experience in Angicos gave good results: all enrolled in the course were able to read and write at its end. This positive outcome called the attention of the Brazilian central authorities at the time. Even the governor of the State of Rio Grande do Norte, Aloízio Alves, and the president of Brazil, João Goulart (also known as “Jango”), were present at the end of the course. Due to his work at Angicos, in the following year (1963) Paulo Freire was invited by the Brazilian Ministry of Education to create the National Program of Education, a work that was interrupt by the military coup of 1964, in which the president was deposed and many people were persecuted, put into prison or had to exile in order not to die, as many did. In this new scenario, the work of Paulo Freire was accused of subversive. He was put into prison and, after, exiled from Brazil. Even today the methodological principles developed by Freire are used in different parts of the world helping people from different backgrounds to learn how to read and write. But his method is much more than that. Using the narrative principle in classes teachers can provide a space for their students express their lives and gain confidence for overcoming their difficulties in a collective way. It is a pedagogical principle that seeks the expression of liberty from all societal tethers.

DANILO DOLCI AND USE OF NARRATIVE FOR A RECIPROCAL MAIEUTIC

Contemporary of Paulo Freire, the Italian educator Danilo Dolci de-

veloped a very important educational work at Sicily, one of the poorest places of Italy at the time. In many ways, Danilo Dolci was a pioneer in using the narrative discourse as an educational principle. One of his most important innovative actions was his work with narratives in the context of workers and other communitarian associations, which gave the possibility for very poor people to have their histories listened in social spaces for mutual cooperation. Danilo Dolci, as puts Vittoria¹³, made the community narrate.

In one of his most insightful books, called *Peasant Conversations* (*Conversazioni contadini*), Danilo Dolci brings us some of the real examples of the application of his methodology of reciprocal maieutic in collective dialogues taken at the communal centre of the poor neighbourhood of Spine Sante, in Sicily. Important issues were brought to that community and, during the process of narration, they had the opportunity to express their opinions and, many times, learned how to resolve some of their problems through the narrative process developed by Dolci. With the reciprocal maieutic, Dolci breaks the cycle of education as a simple way of knowledge transmission and puts the dialogue in the centre of the educational process.

In registering these experiences in a book, Danilo Dolci provides us with the perception that the oppressed people don't have many spaces to narrate and organize themselves collectively in order to construct knowledge about the world or to create the ethics of their coexistence. But, when this space is provided, people feel empowered to take their lives in their own hands and transform to better their societies.

In one example brought in the book, the community discusses the problem of a teacher who asks for a false certificate in order to get a job. The people of the community have the opportunity to express different views about the question through the narrativization process, conducted by Dolci with the reciprocal maieutic. Different from the classical Socratic perspective, the questions made are never in one direction, or produced by someone who already has a solution. On the contrary, all

13 A. Vigilante, *Danilo Dolci: uma revolução comunicativa*, In P. Vittoria and A. Vigilante, *Pedagogias da Libertação. Estudos sobre Freire, Boal, Caputini e Dolci*, Quartet / FAPERJ, Rio de Janeiro 2013.

have the right to narrate their own perceptions and provide solution. Several ethical elements are affronted: if they don't give the certificate for the teacher, he is not going to have a job position, but if they give, they will lie. Narrating they arrive at a solution that congregates the tensions and different views of the issue.

Dealing with fascism through the counter production of narratives

Different times create their own forms of fascisms no matter what they are called. Paulo Freire and Danilo Dolci had to face the fascisms of their times. Bringing back the memory of their work is a continual reminder that we have to face the fascisms of our own times. And they are a lot, no matter their names, they pervade many aspects of the social life of many different countries.

Maybe many younger people of our time don't know (or were not appropriately taught) about the destructive forces of fascism. Maybe they don't know, for example, that during the process of transforming the German society into a nazist society the hitlerist regime spread narratives to diminish the Jewish people and construct the idea that they were inferior beings with racial categorisations. The hitlerist regime also made use of narratives which the main objective was to destroy the dignity of the Germans, to cancel their individuality and submit them to the desires of the forces that conducted that dictatorial regime. Maybe they don't know how the paramilitary organisation called Hitler Youth substituted the schools with the main goal of destroying the capability of criticism and produce people for the blind belief in the regime.

The propaganda machine of the nazist regime produced the mass hypnosis, the fanaticism that, step by step, substituted the democracy. And, at the right moment, came the burnings of forbidden books, persecutions, imprisonments with false or absurd accusations and the fires at the synagogues in the whole country accompanied by shouts as "put the Jewish in the flames" and they put, as we know.

All of us who are committed to building democratic societies need, as soon as possible, to realise the importance of narratives in the educational process of our students. All over the world we have been witnessing the growth of fascist narratives and people engaging in these narratives without realising their destructive power or without any knowledge that these narratives have caused the destruction of thousands of lives in the past.

Today these narratives are much more pernicious because they navigate through the channels of the world wide web. They arrive decoded in personal messages that are previously and accurately constructed through the capture of personal data and the use of algorithms.

In the centre of all this process is the attempt against democracy. The democracy principles have been undermined by the forces of capitalism which always makes use of the technology for its own purposes of domination. Paolo Vittoria¹⁴ is very aware of this problematic when, writing about the work of Danilo Dolci, he says that:

Capitalism is a way out, an impediment to the evolution of the species. Since dominium is made mainly of misleading relations, the true revolution will consist in the conversion of domain relations, in the spreading of intimately open, communicative, and creative maieutic structures throughout the social body. Education is not just about family and school, it is not inculturation of the new generations, nor is it limited to so-called adult education. The maieutics covers the whole of society¹⁵.

More than ever, the works of Paulo Freire and Danilo Dolci are a striking reminder that we need, more than urgently, to create educational spaces in which educators and learners can be aware that fascist narratives are destructive. We urgently need to create spaces to produce our own counter narratives. Narratives that combine education and liberation from all forms of oppression and violence and that lead us to build a world with true equality and justice for all.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Austin J.L., *How to do Things with Words*, Oxford University Press, London 1962.

14 P. Vittoria, *ibid*, p. 298.

15 O capitalismo é uma rua sem saída, um impedimento na evolução da espécie. Uma vez que o domínio é feito, sobretudo, de relações enganosas, a verdadeira revolução consistirá na conversão das relações de domínio, na disseminação em todo o corpo social de estruturas maiêuticas intimamente abertas, comunicativas e criativas. A educação não tem a ver apenas com a família e com a escola, não é inculturação das novas gerações, nem se limita à assim denominada educação dos adultos. A maiêutica abarca toda a sociedade.

Bastos L.C., *Contando estórias em contextos espontâneos e institucionais – uma introdução ao estudo da narrativa*, in “Caleidoscópio” vol 3, n. 2., Ed. Unisinos, 2005, p. 74-87.

Bastos L.C. and Santos W.S., *Caramba, e eu era assim, pelo amor de Deus – a perspectiva do presente na reconstrução identitária em narrativas de conversão religiosa*, In Magalhães I, Grigoletto M. and Coracine M.J. (Orgs) *Práticas Identitárias. Língua e Discurso*, Claraluz, São Carlos 2006, p. 223-234.

Bruner J., *Acts of meaning*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1990.

Dolci D., *Conversazioni contadine*, Il Saggiatore, Milano 2014.

Freire P., *A importância do ato de ler em três artigos que se completam*, Cortez, São Paulo 2011, p. 19-31.

Järvinen M., *Life Histories and the Perspective of the Present*, In “Narrative Inquiry”, 14(1), John Benjamins, Amsterdam 2004, pp.45-68.

Labov W., *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Pennsylvania 1972.

Labov W., and Waletzky J., *Narrative Analysis: oral versions of personal experience*, In “Essays on the verbal and visual arts”, University of Washington Press, Seattle, Washington 1967, pp. 123-144.

Linde C., *Life Stories – The Creation of Coherence*, Oxford University Press, New York 1993.

Randazzo G., *Per una scuola democratica: la dialettica del dialogo. metodologia della Narrazione e della Riflessione*, In “Educazione Democratica”, 2, 2011, pp. 203-216.

Ricoeur P., *Narrative Time*, In “Critical Inquiry”, 7 (1), 1980, p. 169-190.

Ricoeur P., *Time and Narrative* (Vol. 1), University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1984.

Santos W.S. dos, *O longo Caminho até Damasco: rede de mudança e fluxo de mudança em narrativas de conversão religiosa*. Tese de Doutorado. PUC-Rio 2007.

Vigilante A., *Danilo Dolci: uma revolução comunicativa*, In: Vittoria P. and Vigilante A., *Pedagogias da Libertação. Estudos sobre Freire, Boal, Capitini e Dolci*, Quartet / FAPERJ, Rio de Janeiro 2013.

Vittoria P., *L'educazione è la prima cosa! Saggio sulla comunità educante*, Società Editrice Fiorentina, Firenze 2018.

William Soares dos Santos holds a degree in Portuguese / Italian (1997) from UFRJ and a degree in English (2019) from Universidade Estácio de Sá, a master's degree in Applied Linguistics (2002) from UFRJ and a doctorate in Letters (Language Studies) from PUC-Rio. (2007). He is Associate Professor at the College of Education of UFRJ, where he works as Professor of Portuguese / Italian Teaching Practice. He is also Professor of the Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Program in Applied Linguistics (PIPGLA) and at the Postgraduate Program in Neolatine Letters (PPGLEN) of the College of Letters of UFRJ. His current research involves Education, Teacher Training and Narrative Studies. His investigations are developed in specific contexts of Italian, Lusophone (with emphasis on Brazilian contexts) and English-speaking Anglo-Saxon cultures.