

Education and (self)formation in revisiting educational memories: an autobiographical journey from the experiences of a Brazilian student (1985-1998)

Educação e (auto)formação na revisitação de memórias educacionais: uma jornada autobiográfica das experiências de um estudante brasileiro (1985-1998)

Educación y (auto)formación en la revisitación de las memorias educativas: un viaje autobiográfico a partir de las experiencias de un estudiante brasileño (1985-1998)

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Abstract: This article, based on self-narrative, aims to point out the moments considered formative in my education path from the moment I arrived at an institution for poor and street kids in 1985 until the moment I finished a technical school in 1998. The use of (self)biographical narratives is defended by some authors like (Nóvoa, 1988; Josso, 1988,2007; Ferraroti, 1988; Bolívar, 2016 and Abrahão, 2003) who believe that writing/narrating the events of our personal and professional life can lead us to find meaning in our own life trajectory, and with it we can promote transformations and changes that will help us to understand ourselves and the others. This look into the past may, in some way, helps us to find and understand ourselves and think today as a person who has built a personal and professional path in living with others. The meeting with a teacher who has been dedicating her life to help socially vulnerable boys and girls was a crucial moment in the student's educational path. The student dives into his memories and (re)visits and (re)builds moments considered formative and important for his social transformation. The meeting with a teacher was the beginning of a social and educational transformation in their lives. The theoretical and methodological foundations used for its constructions are based on the assumptions of qualitative research using (self)biographical narrative method and semi-structured interviews.

Keywords: Autobiography; Street boys; Memories; Teacher; Child police; (Self)narrative; Education..

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Resumo: Este artigo, por meio de narração (auto)biográfica, tem como objetivo apontar os momentos considerados formativos no meu percurso educativo, a partir da entrada em uma instituição em 1985 e a conclusão de um curso técnico em 1998. A utilização do recurso das narrativas (auto)biográficas é defendida por alguns autores (Nóvoa, 1988; Josso, 2007; Ferrarotti, 1988; Bolívar, 2016; e Abrahão, 2012) que acreditam que ao escrever/narrar os acontecimentos de nossa vida pessoal e profissional, poderá nos levar ao encontro de significados dentro da nossa trajetória de vida e por meio de uma tomada de consciência promovermos transformações e mudanças que ajudem a compreensão do eu (de si mesmo) e dos outros. Esse olhar para o passado poderá, de alguma forma, colaborar na promoção de encontro consigo mesmo e refletir hoje como pessoas que foram construindo um percurso pessoal e profissional na convivência com outros. O encontro com uma professora que vem dedicando sua vida para em prol de meninos e meninas em situação de vulnerabilidade social foi um ponto crucial no percurso educativo do estudante que por meio de um mergulho nas memórias (re)visita e (re)constrói momentos considerados formadores e importantes para sua transformação social. A partir desse encontro com a professora educação começava uma transformação sem volta nas nossas vidas. Os fundamentos teórico-metodológicos utilizados para construção deste artigo, baseiam-se nos pressupostos da pesquisa qualitativa com o método de narrativas (auto)biográficas.

Palavras-chave: Autobiografia. Educação. (Auto)formação. Meninos de Rua. Espaço Educativo. Professora. Polícia Mirim.

Resumen: Este artículo, a través de la narración (auto)biográfica, pretende señalar los momentos considerados formativos en mi trayectoria educativa, desde el ingreso en una institución en 1985 hasta la conclusión de un curso técnico en 1998. El uso de narrativas (auto)biográficas es defendido por algunos autores (Nóvoa, 1988; Josso, 2007; Ferrarotti, 1988; Bolívar, 2016; y Abrahão, 2012) que creen que escribir/narrar los acontecimientos de nuestra vida personal y profesional puede llevarnos a encontrar significados dentro de nuestra trayectoria vital y, a través de la toma de conciencia, promover transformaciones y cambios que nos ayuden a comprender al yo y a los demás. Esta mirada al pasado puede, de alguna manera, ayudar a promover el encuentro con uno mismo y a reflexionar sobre el hoy como personas que han ido construyendo un camino personal y profesional en convivencia con los demás. El encuentro con una profesora que ha dedicado su vida a ayudar a niños y niñas en situación de vulnerabilidad social fue un punto crucial en el itinerario educativo del alumno, que a través de una inmersión en sus recuerdos (re)visita y (re)construye momentos que considera formativos e importantes para su transformación social. A partir de este encuentro con el profesor de educación, se inicia una transformación sin vuelta atrás en nuestras vidas. Los fundamentos teóricos y metodológicos utilizados para la construcción de este artículo se basan en los presupuestos de la investigación cualitativa utilizando el método de narrativas autobiográfica.

Palabras clave: Autobiografía. Educación. (Auto)formación. Niños de la Calle. Espacio Educativo. Profesor. Policía Juvenil.

1. Introduction

This article also corroborates with the thought of Freitas and Galvão (2007:2) who argue that the understanding of individual consciousness and the use of narrative can bring to light what is hidden, configuring as a method that establishes the connection between the mental process and the discourse, through self-knowledge and the experience of self. For these researchers, the use of "autobiographical narrative" is based on the idea that when we narrate meaningful episodes, we will analyze them in a contextualized way, trying



to make this analysis show emotions, experiences, or small remarkable facts that we had not noticed before.

According to Hoskins (1998)⁴ narrative is also a formative process, since through the narrative resource people, in telling their stories, not only provide information about themselves, but can also shape their own identity.

Thus, Esteban (2010, p. 153), recognizes that through the autobiographical method "the human being regains the protagonism, in relation to the excessive abstractions and dehumanization of positivist scientism. Pujadas (1992); Santamarina and Marinas (1995) state that this phenomenon brings a characteristic or symptom of an era that we can call biographical symptom".

Starting from the principle that the (auto)biographical method represents a moment of paradigmatic transition (Nóvoa 1988) to talk about the change in the scientific making, leaving a positivist paradigm, which did not consider the subjectivity nor the life stories of the subjects starts to be overcome by a heuristic vision, more personal, valuing the micro stories and not only the big stories. For Nóvoa, narrating and reflecting about oneself contributes not only to the educational/professional formation, but also represents a way of looking at the "I" in the several dimensions of life.

As a research methodology, Nóvoa and Finger (1988), recognize that the use of the (auto)biographical method is relatively recent in the sciences of education. It is a methodological vision which emerged in Germany at the end of the 19th century, as a sociological alternative to positivism. Ferrarotti (1988), one of the authors who claims the autonomy of the method, emphasizes the use of (auto)biographical narratives as a methodological renovation.

Bolivar (2016, p. 3), points out that within qualitative research the biographical and narrative approach has acquired an identity of its own as a way of producing knowledge in educational and social research". For this author, it is an investigation that as a "hermeneutic methodology allows jointly to give meaning and "comprender las dimensiones cognitivas, afectivas y de acción" (understand the cognitive, affective and actions dimensions). In this way, the narrative assumes itself subjective and invites the subject to talk about himself.

⁴ HOSKINS, Janet (1998). Biographical objects: how things tell the stories of people's lives. Routledge. New York, USA.



With the theoretical support of some authors, by revisiting childhood memories, the narrator (me) dives into the ocean of memories in order to identify the moments considered formative in the period from 1985 to 1998.

In this process of revisiting the educational memories, I go in search of some meanings for my (auto)formative process, pointing out, during the writing of this, the facts and moments that I considered relevant in this trajectory. Thus, I share with the reader the escape from school and from home at the age of six, I also share with the readers a little of the joys and sorrows of living and survive on the streets, the meeting with a dreamy teacher who believes that education is an excellent tool for social inclusion, being left in an institution for children who lived on the margins of society, and how education/training transformed me within the institutional space.

Like Nóvoa (1988. P. 129) we understand that "[...] the contemporary use of (auto)biographical approaches is the result of the dissatisfaction of the social sciences in relation to the type of knowledge produced and the need for a renewal of the modes of scientific knowledge". Nóvoa recognizes the integral formative potential of the autobiographical method for its heuristic quality, which enables the discovery of oneself, of one's historical path by revisiting one's memories.

2. (Re)discovering myself: the beginning of a (self)narrative journey

The self-discovery and coming to consciousness happens, even unconsciously, still in the narrator's childhood period, when not being able to stand the forms of treatment by his stepmother, he decides to run away from home.

In my mind I had already decided that I would leave home. I told my brother that I would run away the next morning and that he should come with me. Life on the street would be different... we would have many things... many toys... and most of all our stepmother would never beat us again. Arguments that were not enough to convince my brother. And at dawn, taking advantage that my father and my stepmother were still asleep, I silently opened the door and flew away without even knowing what awaited me out there. The first time I ran away from home I must have stayed two or three months on the street. Trying to survive/living. As a child you don't worry much about where you are going to sleep, what we have to eat, what we are going to wear. As a child you only think about playing (Joseph, 2018⁵).

⁵ As this paper is based on (auto)biographical narrative, I will use "Joseph, 2018", every time when I am speaking. The excerpts were from an (auto)narrative developed in 2018.



The first days (in the beginning) of my new life on the streets were a time of adaptation. I had to think on my own, find a place to sleep, know where and how I would find food, and make new friends. In debt about what to do, it was just reproducing what the other kids were doing. They had much more experiences. They were living on the streets longer than me.

I had to beg for food and when I couldn't get anything, I had to steal to not starve. Often it was in the garbage that he found something to eat. It was such a common scene that people didn't even care about those invisible children. I soon made new friends. The new friends had been on the street longer than me. They must know things, I thought. And they did. From them I learned how to sniff glue to inhibit hunger or cold. They said that with glue we got high and didn't feel anything. It was with them that the first crimes (robberies) started, which were usually toys, clothes, household utensils, aluminum pans (to sell), and fruits. We were always inventing some game and most of the day we would bathe in a pond in the center of the city. It was there that I learned to swim by myself. That was also our meeting place (Joseph, 2018).

Narrating my life story is also a way of knowing my history and understanding the paths that brought me here, since the life story allows us to become aware, simultaneously, of our dependencies and our freedoms, our achievements and our limitations, the meaning and non-meaning of our lives, received ideas and personally elaborated conceptions. It puts us in front of the responsibility we have in our life choices and the creativity regarding the means we give ourselves to create conditions where the quality of human relations and social relationships includes mutual respect, the joy of sharing, and the concern for intercomprehension (Josso in Malpique, 2002, p. 153). In this context, we (re)know life stories as an approach to knowledge, about oneself, and mobilizing the personal construction of the subject - "knowledge for oneself" (Couceiro, 1996 in Malpique, 2002).

In this way, life stories present the subject as a product of his knowledge of multiple knowledges and knowledge of self, promoting the interaction between knowledge and personal experience, as important elements in the formation of self. The person produces a life story, which in turn produces the person. Somehow, by doing, by narrating, by constructing his life story, the subject constructs and reconstructs his past and, in this construction, potentializes and opens the future to multiple possible projects (Couceiro, 1996 in Malpique, 2002).

For Josso (in Nóvoa and Finger, 1988) the time of oral narrative is a necessary moment for the mobilization of memories and their selection and ordering in a continuum, almost always chronological, leading the subject to think about what training is, from his point of view, understanding how this training takes place and how it happens. According to the author, the singularity of the narrative that the subject builds represents a reflection process characterized by the mobilization of memory, by the discriminative game of thought, thus the ordering of the training path becomes a narrative and a work simultaneously individual and collective, for being a narrative that articulates the period of an existence that mobilizes several facts. The balance between the search for autonomy and conformity can appear at different moments in the narratives, sometimes even in childhood: overcoming, autonomy, imaginary world (Josso, 2007).

Therefore, when we make a narration of our life history a set of acquisitions accumulated throughout life is analyzed in terms of learning and knowledge. For Josso the learnings can be existential (knowledge of oneself), instrumental (for example a practical life in a particular culture or historical moment), relational (behavior, communication with others, knowing how to be with oneself and with others), and reflexive (knowing how to think in explanatory and comprehensive references).

Thus, the narration allows us to detect formative stages/moments and the people who permeated the context in which the narrator considers a formative space. Here the memory brings out the figure of the psychologist, as an important person in the student's awareness of the importance of the school in my formative process and in the attempt to make the institution a home, even without understanding, at first, the institutional rules

[...] from this phase I remember a lot of the psychologist who worked in the institution. Whenever something happened at school or a fight with other kids, he was the one I went to. He knew about many things. It even seemed like he was in my mind. He always knew what I was feeling. He would say things that made me cry. He helped me to realize how important school was. So I did not give up school. I soon got the hang of school and realized that this would be the only way for me to (re)tell my story (Joseph, 2018).

As time went by I was adapting to the FUNDANOR⁶ context. The rules and routines of life in the institution were changing my way of living being in the world and my body was already starting to adapt to this new reality:

⁶ Fundação de Amparo ao Menor – FUNDANOR (Foundation for the Support of Minors).



Usually we had to get up at 6 a.m. It was a big dormitory with four rows of bunks. On the weekends we would wake up at 7 a.m. When we didn't wake up on time, Dona Maria would appear at the dormitory door with a bell in her hand. She would ring it until the last boy left the dorm. After the morning activities, we all went to the chapel. The day only begins after talking to God, said Dona Maria. On Sundays it was everyone's obligation to go to mass. Dona Maria always accompanied us. After a certain age and after having gained her trust We could go alone and choose Saturday or Sunday' mass. On the way back we had to talk about the mass so that she could be sure that we really went. You had to talk about the gospel and the readings. Who was the priest that celebrated the mass. If the church was full, etc. Of course, we would go to church early, pick up the little newspaper and go to a square in the center of town. There I would meet other boys and we would flirt until it was time to go back. There was a pact between us: nobody would tell anybody about this. At that time school was still a nightmare for most of the boys who lived there. For me, it was day by day the construction of myself (Joseph, 2018)

This narrative is also a way of understanding myself. And as Bourdieu (2004, p. 15) emphasizes, "to understand is first of all to understand the field in which we made ourselves and against which we made ourselves." To understand as someone who at the age of 12 had the first opportunity to attend the educational system and experience the joys and sorrows hidden there, since the educational system legitimizes "the cultural inequalities that exist between children of different social classes" (Bourdieu, 2003).

For Bolívar

Telling your own experiences and "reading" (in the sense of "interpreting") these facts/actions, in the light of the stories that agents narrate, becomes a peculiar research perspective. It is a matter of giving full relevance to the discursive dimension of individuality, to the ways in which humans experience and give meaning to the "world of life" through language. Subjectivity is also a necessary condition of social knowledge (Bolívar, 2016, p. 4).⁷

Therefore, narrative is a capacity inherent to the human being, and for some authors it is configured as the appropriate factor of humanization of the individual. Although there are different ways of understanding the human being, the story that he builds, through the narrative of him/her(self), is special to indicate clues about the subject. It is through narrative that the human being captures and exposes his impressions about

⁷ "Contar las propias vivencias, y "leer" (en el sentido de "interpretar") dichos hechos/acciones, a la luz de las historias que los agentes narran, se convierte en un perspectiva peculiar de investigación. Se trata de otorgar toda su relevancia a la dimensión discursiva de la individualidad, a los modos como los humanos vivencian y dan significado al "mundo de la vida" mediante el lenguaje. La subjetividad es, también, una condición necesaria del conocimiento socia". Free translation from Spanish into English.

himself, as well as organizes and presents his representations about the world, about events and his experiences in this world.

According to Nóvoa (1988), the attempts to narrate our life stories represent clues whose purpose is to guide the elaboration of the biographical material and that, in a certain way, help to organize our memories, as a script for the description of our life path. However, not everything can be evoked. In life stories "what interests us is that the individual builds his life memory and understands the paths that his experiential heritage can open to him: by doing so in the present he is forming himself (emancipating himself) and projecting himself into the future" (Nóvoa, 1988, p. 125).

If the subject/person is able to revisit his memories and understand his/her life story through awareness, he/she will produce changes and transformations in him/her(self) and for him/her(self).

Therefore, the following excerpt is the result of the context in which the narrator/student was inserted for several years and which is part of the process of becoming aware of his own formative/self-formative journey, bringing the figure of a teacher, the work she did to make the world less unfair for the children who went to FUNDANOR, and the meaning she represents in their lives journey.

3. There was a teacher in the middle of the way

Maria, of indigenous descent, was born on April 6, 1926, in Candará - Serra dos Macacos, municipality of Palmeira dos Índios, Alagoas-Brazil, daughter of the farming couple José Monteiro Bastos and Josefa Monteiro de Jesus. Maria Monteiro is the firstborn of a family of eight children.

At the age of 39, Dona Josefa dies of cancer of the uterus, and it is up to Maria, the oldest daughter, to take care of the education of her siblings. The father moves to Rio de Janeiro in search of better conditions, a common scene in the city, also in many cities of the Northeast of Brazil, many people decide to go to São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro trying to find a job and better opportunities. Already living in Palmeira dos Índios, Maria continued her studies with the help of a teacher who made sure to involve her in all school activities. Hard working and very dedicated, she won a place in Professor Saraiva's Gymnasium, a renowned school at the time. She transferred to Cristo Redentor School, where she studied

to become a teacher, which would give her the grade of elementary school teacher. On November 30, 1947 Maria finally finished the course and became a teacher, as her mother had always dreamed. The following year she went to work as a teacher in Sítio Anum, at the Escola Isolada do Anum. In 1952 she was approved in a public contest to become a teacher for the State of Alagoas and went to work at the Monsenhor Luiz Ribeiro School, in Palmeira de Fora. Years later she was transferred to the Pio XII School. Noticing her charisma for community activities, Bishop Dom Otávio Aguiar arranged with the State Government for Maria to be made available to the Diocese, where she remained for 15 years. In 1977, at the age of 54, Maria decided to retire, but she did not distance herself from the religious movements and also decided to do volunteer service at the Escola Sagrada Família (Holy Family School) from 1978 to 1984.

Maria has no biological children, but she is honored to show the pride of having embraced and lent her lap and her time to all those who have not had the chance of a decent life. All are her children and her children's children are her grandchildren, as she makes a point of saying.

In 1978, when teacher Maria Monteiro received official confirmation that she was already retired, she decided that from that moment on she had fulfilled her role as an educator and left her contribution to the social transformation in the lives of many children who passed through her classroom. She didn't know that one more mission, or the most important mission of her life was about to begin. It was right there, on her doorstep. In October of the same year she scolded two boys who were playing in the garden of her house.

I was so angry at that memento that I yelled at the boys and when I said: Why aren't you at home having dinner now? At this time you should be at home eating. And they said: We have nothing to eat, senhora. I felt so bad hearing that and I decided to help those boys (Lourdes, 2019).

The institution born out of Professor Maria's work represents a place where the narrator/student builds affective bonds and (re)knows himself as a member of a group, belonging to a family, a community of affection.

4. From "we have nothing senhora" to a place for "another childhood"

About this "other childhood", category that were the orphans, exposed, disabled and slaves, Fernandes (1994, p. 24), emphasizes that the sources do not say much or almost nothing and that if "someone even by charity did not help them, they were condemned to die of hunger and live in misery". On the theme of this other childhood, children from less fortunate families, who lived in poverty and were condemned to abandonment and delinquency, the historical studies of Martins (2006, 214)⁸, in the context of Portugal and Rizzini (2006, 2011)⁹, in the context of Brazil, trace a representation of this stigmatized childhood throughout history. These authors, among other issues, point out that for this "other childhood", characterized as vagrant, delinquent, aggressive, carrier of diseases, the need arose to create laws that would benefit and protect this portion of society, which was in a situation of abandonment (Martins, 2014; Rizzini, 2011), in the early decades of the twentieth century.

It is exactly in this perspective of support and protection to this other childhood that the Fundação de Amparo ao Menor-FUNDANOR (Foundation for the Support of Minors) was created, founded on October 12, 1980, in the city of Palmeira dos Índios. It is an institution that was born from the stories of two boys who were playing in the garden of the teacher's house and her will to change the history of boys and girls who lived on the streets of the city. It is an institution that was born from a "HAVING NOTHING" by the hands of teacher Maria, who always wanted to work with the elderly. As she once said, "I find it a necessity to alleviate the pain and anguish that the elderly suffer". And whenever she talked about this desire of hers, people discouraged her, saying that they will think you are just after money for the elderly. She gives up before she even starts.

One day she notices that the energy bill was getting higher and higher, and since she works out all day, she suspects that someone might be taking advantage of it, or even some children taking advantage of her absence to play in her garden. She then, the next day, decides to stay home to check who was wasting her water. At 6:00 PM she notices two boys come out to play in the garden and immediately turn on the faucet and start

⁸ MARTINS, E. C. (2014). Marginalized and delinquent childhood in the 1st Republic (1910-1926). De perdidos a protegidos e educados. Ed. Polimage: Lisbon.

⁹ RIZZINI, I. (2011). A arte de governar crianças: a história das políticas sociais, da legislação e da assistência à infância no Brasil. Cortez editora: Rio de Janeiro.



throwing water at each other. She watches everything from her window, doing her best not to be seen. She went out the backyard gate, turned around and surprised the two boys. They tried to run, but she had blocked the gate. "Then I started to unload the book of ignorance on the boys. You must have a home, right? You should be at home having dinner. Before I could even finish my sentence, one of the boys replied, "we have nothing".

Disconcerted by the boy's answer, she realized that "having nothing" means much more than simply not having dinner. "Having nothing" at that moment meant having no food, no home, no school, no affection, and no right to have a dignified childhood. In an attempt to correct the injustice she had just commented on and moved by the spontaneity of the boys, Maria invited them to have some soup, and the boys, although suspicious, accepted the invitation. While the boys were eating she tried a conversation with them. "What is your name?" One said he did not know his name and that the other's name was Pinga Preta. When they finished dinner they immediately asked if they could come back the next day. "Of course you can! You can come!" answers Dona Maria. They showed up the next day with two more boys. Then four more...eight...ten...fifteen...twenty...

From that night on, after the teacher's encounter with the two boys, and during the following four years, more and more needy children began to dine daily at Maria's. Her few resources were no longer sufficient for almost anything. "Don't bring any more children, because I can't afford to provide meals for many people," she used to say to the boys. Even so, there were already a large number of children. She began to ask her neighbors for help and started serving only two meals a week, only at night. With time, she gained the trust of the children. They then tell her almost everything about their lives, their mother, father, brothers, family activities, and the day to day life of each one of them. Almost all of them stole, used some kind of drugs, or sniffed glue. Most were shoeshine boys¹⁰. They used a wooden box to hide the glue and some razors to cut purses. When they took some money from the market vendors or from the old people's pensions, they shared it with the others. They committed petty crimes in Palmeira and neighboring towns.

The teacher Maria and her small team sought out the local authorities to inform them about the work they intended to start and to try to get some support. The religious leaders, the police chief, the mayor, and the Juvenile Court became aware of the work that

¹⁰ A shoeshine boy is the person responsible for polishing and cleaning shoes.



was happening in the teacher's house and made themselves available to help in some way. In this period some people were already helping the teacher in the development of some activities with the boys, these activities took place in the street, outside the teacher's house. José Francisco¹¹ was the first person to show solidarity with the work that was happening in the teacher's home, and together they sought help to get a bigger space to receive all the boys.

[...] Attracted by the motorcycle, the kids were already running to meet José Francisco, and the number increased more and more. At night, after the soup, there were lectures and games. As the boys started arriving earlier and earlier, José Francisco was responsible for the physical activities and the organization of soccer, right there on the street. At the end of June 1983, Pacífico¹² contacted Maria to say that he was also willing to collaborate with the work. Being a military policeman, Pacífico is soon responsible for the physical activities and discipline of the boys (Maria, 2019, p.10).

On September 7th of the same year, during the parade commemorating the independence of Brazil, the team decided that the boys should participate in the city's official/civic celebrations. They got some donations of shoes, shirts, and sandals, which were not enough for all the boys, so some boys paraded barefoot. As the teacher points out, the boys carried a banner that said, "PROTECT THE MINOR, FOR WE ARE THE FUTURE OF BRAZIL". On September 7, 1983, the society of Palmeira dos Índios became aware that there was work with street kids in the city. What later became the Fundação de Amparo ao Menor-FUNDANOR and had as one of its educational projects the formation of the Polícia Mirim, where the boys received training to act as if they were real soldiers/police officers.

The Polícia Mirim¹³ was a semi-boarding school (FUNDANOR). The boys spent the whole day at the institution and at the end of the day they returned home, except for those who had no family ties, who stayed at Maria's house, about thirty boys. The teacher always believed that the family should also participate in the formation of young people. For this reason, during 1983¹⁴ She, together with the institution staff, decided to make home visits

¹¹ José Francisco was participating in a couples' meeting promoted by the city's diocese and, after hearing the teacher's account of the work he was doing with the boys in his house, he decided, along with his wife, to accompany the teacher on this journey.

¹² A military policeman who decides to put into practice a project whose objective was the military training of boys, the Mirim Police. By means of rigid discipline, the boys begin to change.

¹³ The Child Police

¹⁴ This information appears in an institutional report from 1983. In that year 160 boys between the ages of 10 and 17 attended the institution and were part of the Polícia Mirim regiment.



to all the families of the boys who were in the institution. This means that not all the youngsters who attended the institution were orphans. According to the teacher, all the families that they had visited began to believe in the work of the institution and decided to accompany their children more effectively.

The following year, the boys were already cooperating with society: working in the ostensive policing service to maintain order and security in the markets, fighting robbery in the open markets; also providing security services in commercial houses and working in traffic policing, all accompanied and oriented by Pacífico and José Francisco.

The Polícia Mirim, as a formative project, was never Maria's intention, but she recognized that the work done by Pacífico transformed the lives of those boys in some way. Thanks to the work of Polícia Mirim, many youngsters managed to enter the job market and soon stopped attending the institution, sometimes returning for a visit or to talk to the teacher.

5. Memory and narration in the construction of (my) life story

Jacques Le Goff states that "[...] memory is the ability to retain certain information, a property that refers to a set of psychic functions that allows the individual to update past impressions or information, or information interpreted as past" (1994, p. 419).

For Bosi (2003) memory operates with great freedom choosing events in space and time, not arbitrarily, but because they are related through common indexes. They are more intense configurations when the glow of a collective meaning falls upon them, but "the first testimony to which we can resort will always be our own" (Halbwachs, 2003, p. 29). In relation to the study and understanding of memory, Le Goff, emphasizes its identity character as something important to be able to conceptualize it. For him, "memory is an essential element of what is usually called identity, individual or collective, whose search is one of the fundamental activities of individuals and societies today, in fever and distress" (Le Goff, 1994, p. 435).

The French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (2003), presents us an understanding of individuals' memories as being continuously fed by other subjects' experiences that share common or even diverse places, groups, and times. For the author, the community of affection is the place where, through the feeling of belonging, the tradition



or the set of memories that unifies a group is established. The affective relations make the individual capable of remembering as a member of the group, because it inserts him/her in his/her past in order to apprehend common mentalities, habits, and thoughts. The subject recognizes himself and thinks as someone in that group. Forgetfulness happens when the bond vanishes in ephemeral coexistence: "to forget a period of life is to lose contact with those who then surrounded us" (Halbwachs, 2003, p.37).

According to Halbwachs,

Our memories remain collective and are remembered to us by others, even if they are events that only we were involved in and objects that only we saw. This is because we are never alone. It is not necessary that others are present, materially distinct from us, because we always carry with us and in us a certain number of people who are not confused (Halbwachs, 2003, p. 30).

Schmidt and Mahfoud (1993), based on Halbwachs' thought, emphasizes that the individual who remembers is always an individual inserted and accustomed by reference groups, the memory is always constructed by a group, but it is also a work of the subject. For these authors, a remembrance/remembering seed can remain an abstract data, it can also be formed into an image and remain as such, or, finally, it can become a living memory. These destinies depend on the absence or presence of other subjects that constitute a reference group. Such representation is evidenced in the military training process of the institutionalized youth, where the student, the narrator himself, his group of belonging, talks about the activities within the space of the institution and the power relations and discipline (Foucault, 2014) in the context of FUNDANOR.

I was a junior police officer in training. I was learning the military craft. The teacher Maria was in charge of the school supervision, teaching the official military and patriotic anthems: the national anthem, the state anthem, the Palmeira dos Índios anthem, the soldier's anthem, the army anthem, the flag anthem, the navy anthem, the infantry anthem and many others. It was also her job to teach religious education, which included singing and prayers. This was done every morning. Mr. Pacífico, a retired policeman and the creator of the Junior Police, was in charge of the military orientation and physical training. The boys who were already soldiers, after their activities with the teacher Maria, were sent to the streets for a kind of daily round, others went to a farm, a ranch, these ones were already inserted in agricultural and cattle raising activities, and the other boys, the "mocorongos"¹⁵, stayed to learn military marches and commands, an activity monitored by two or three boys who already had the rank of junior "corporal or sergeant". So I spent the rest of the morning listening and doing:

¹⁵ Term used within the institutional space, only by the boys, to designate the young men who were in the process of learning the military trade. It was also a form of provocation that caused many fights among the boys.



"Marche! Alto! Cover! Rest! Right turn! Left turn!". Every time someone made a mistake it was punishment of some sort. Taking push-ups, doing many laps around the group, walking a certain distance in a few minutes, or even getting a few lashes. The school was open at night and everyone was obliged to attend. In a short time I was already wearing the cream uniform, making rounds around town and ensuring security in some commercial establishments (Joseph, 2018)

For Halbwachs (2003) the reference group is a group of which the individual has already been part and with which he establishes a community of thoughts, identifies himself, and con-fused his past. The group is present to the individual not necessarily by physical presence, but by the possibility that the individual has of returning the modes of thought and the common experience proper to the group. Therefore, memory is always the fruit of a collective process and is always inserted in a precise social context. As is the case of the student's first contact with the school universe

My father decided to send us to school. I think I was about 6 or 7 years old. We waited a few minutes until the teacher arrived. She had the key to the room. It was not really a school building. The literacy classes for the children were held in a community center and only after they were literate were they sent to an official school. There were two lines, one for boys and one for girls. We entered and prayed the "Our Father" and a "Hail Mary", looking at a crucifix that was on one of the walls of the room. After the prayers the teacher wrote something on the board and asked everyone to repeat: "A, E, I, O, U" and a big chorus echoed throughout the room. When the teacher asked everyone to repeat the lesson individually, I refused, even though she insisted a lot, and I even hit a boy who laughed at me. I went to detention. On my knees on the corncobs and looking at the wall until recess time. I didn't cry, I didn't complain... and I didn't come back the next day (Joseph, 2018).

For Abrahão (2012), when we talk about memory as a training and self-training resource we must be aware that autobiographical research

[...] Life History, Biographies, Autobiographies, Memories - notwithstanding the use of various sources, such as narratives, oral history, photos, videos, films, diaries, documents on record, it recognizes itself as dependent on memory. This is the essential component in the narrator's characteristic that the researcher works with to be able to (re)construct elements of analysis that can help him/her in the understanding of a certain object of study" (Abrahão, 2012, p. 80).¹⁶

And this (re)visitation to the past, fruit of an action built in the present, can help us find explanations for meanings that justify our personal and professional path. This idea is reinforced in the decision of the child, of the "child me", when I was forced to follow my father and stepmother, who led me to an institution and there I decided to stay. I believe

¹⁶ Free translation from Portuguese into English.



that I have made many decisions that can explain my life path, but exchanging the freedom of the streets for school and life in the institution may not have been easy, but it was one of the most significant for my formative process. The day they took me to FUNDANOR

[...] I was playing with paper boats while my brothers were watching "Xou da Xuxa," a very famous children's program at the time. Shirtless, barefoot, I didn't even notice that my father and stepmother were approaching. It never crossed my mind that one day they would appear there. I have no idea how they found the house. "Zika"¹⁷ I hear someone calling me. I finally raise my eyes and see the two of them. Where are your brothers? I answer that they are watching TV. I go to call them. When I tell them the news they don't seem to believe me. The stepmother immediately says that we are going to go to a place and we will never leave. Without complaining we take our belongings and go with them. We walked for a few minutes. It was a large yellow building with only one entrance. A gray wooden door and large windows in the same color. Some time later a lady with white hair, glasses and a few spots on her skin appears. The woman welcomes us, asks if we are hungry, and asks us to sit on a wooden bench in a room that looked like a reception area. She calls someone and orders them to give us a plate of couscous with milk and coffee while she goes to talk to my father. It was a very large dining hall. With huge tables and colorful tablecloths with fruit designs. A very nice lady brings the food. In a few minutes the plates are empty. I hear some military commands, get scared and realize where I am: "this is the Polícia Mirim" I whisper to my brothers, who seem more scared than I am (Joseph, 2018).

The memory of the first meeting with the teacher, the food and the physical space of the institution appear as an old photograph that is read and analyzed in the present and for Bosi

Bergson brought new light to the surprising phenomena of individual memory: the memory, the image that surfaces and makes alive a face we lost years ago, a voice heard in childhood that returns obsessively and faithful to its own timbre... This Proustian evocation that autobiographical accounts show as psychic activity endowed with strength and meaning (Bosi, 2013, p.40)¹⁸.

Therefore, memory is a work about time lived. For Pierre Nora (1993, p. 23) "memory is life, always carried by living groups and, in this sense, it is in permanent evolution, open to the dialectics of remembering and forgetting, unaware of its successive deformations, vulnerable to all uses and manipulations, susceptible to long latencies and sudden revitalizations".

¹⁷ The first thing I noticed in the context of the institution was the nicknames. All the boys knew each other and called each other by nicknames. Some nicknames generated fights and arguments. This was something that the teacher tried to fight strongly within the institution.

¹⁸ Free translation from Portuguese to English.

According to Jenne Marie Gagnebin (2009, p.97)¹⁹, in history, education, philosophy, and psychology "the care for memory makes it not only an object of study, but also an ethical task: our duty would consist in preserving memory, in saving the vanished, the past, in rescuing, as they say, traditions, lives, speech, and images."

This (re)visitation of childhood memories that is described in the following narration, and in some way, is the starting point in the narrator's changing educational process

I lived in Quebrangulo, a town about 30 minutes from Palmeira dos Índios, where I still live today. I was 4 or 5 years old, I think. I spent more time with my mother because my father worked outside the home and only came home on the weekends or every 15 days. Sometimes my mother would leave the house and leave my brothers and I locked up, she told us not to go out. Those were the happiest days, because we could play our favorite games: burning things. I loved burning plastic bags and watching that liquid run down the floor. I carry on my chest a mark from those games: a burn that marked my body forever, like a tattoo, a painting from a time that is no more and that my memory persists in carrying. My mother always punished us for something. I never understood those punishments (Joseph, 2018)..

Just as I never understood the separation of my parents. That is still an unknown process for me. But I remember that

We stayed at an aunt's house for a couple of weeks, because my father had to take care of something. It was very early when my father came back to the aunt's house where we were staying, saying that we had to go with him. We didn't have many things. Some clothes, slippers and some toys that we made ourselves. We accompanied dad who took us to the city train station, talked to some people and put us on the train. About 20 minutes later we were already in Palmeira dos Índios. We stayed in a wagon that was used by the railroad workers as a kitchen or something. Our new home. I remember that my father bought a bag of bread, locked us in the wagon and left. There was a lot of butter and sugar in there, that was our food for a while. But we didn't complain, it was delicious bread with butter and sugar, sugar with butter, coffee with butter, those recipes that only children can make. Eat, play and eat. One morning my father arrived and said that he had found a woman and that she would take care of us from that day on. We take our belongings and follow my father to the house of this woman. Dad says: this is Dileuza and she will take care of you now. While my father spoke I swept the house with a curious look that only children have. It was a simple house, but what caught my attention was a clothesline with tripe and fish that was next to the wood stove. Even as a child I have always been suspicious and liked to analyze people. I immediately felt that this woman didn't like me or my brothers. I told this to my older brother who didn't even realize what I had said. But that was fine. We all stayed. The next day, the woman began to force us to do housework and made us go to the slaughterhouses in town to get chicken intestines to eat. At that time,

¹⁹ GAGNEBIN, Jeanne Marie (2009). Lembrar escrever esquecer. 2ª edição. Editora 34: São Paulo



many people in the city were looking for chicken tripe to eat, so we had to leave home very early, often in the dark, in order to get anything (Joseph, 2018).

The memories and construction of the narrative open a path that leads me to understand not only the actions taken in childhood, but also the meanings of these actions in my personal and professional life.

For Maurice Halbwachs in Schmidt and Mahfoud (1993), memory, the work of remaking the past with ideas, with current experiences, is not about reliving it or trying to imagine how it would have been; what is in vogue is the effort that is made to construct the past in face of current possibilities. And the movement through which we construct/resurrect these memories/recordings leads us to multiple paths and (re)encounters.

According to Bosi (1994), in the construction of a narrative, this narrative, where the narrator is subject and object at the same time: subject when we ask, we go in search of answers, and object, when we listen, we register as if we were an instrument capable of receiving and transmitting our memories.

However, Bosi (1994, p. 38), emphasizes that our temporal rhythms were subjugated by the industrial society, which bent time to its rhythm, contributing to the emergence of the rationalization of life hours. We can define it as the time of the commodity in human consciousness, crushing the time of friendship, the familiar, the religious. "Memory reconquers them insofar as it is a work on time, encompassing also these marginal times and those lost in the mercantile vertigo."

Therefore, we should not perceive memory as non-passivity, but an organized form, so we must respect the choices that the "rememberers" follow in the evocation of their affective map of their experience and the experience of the group in which they are inserted. And for autobiographical statements it is worth considering that these are, besides historical testimony, and evolution of the person in time (Bosi, 1994).

6. Concluding Remarks

Talking and writing about my life story makes me understand that narratives are subjective and open paths for the subject to talk about herself/himself and (re)discover and (re)know herself/himself in the construction of meanings that enable the production of knowledge about herself/himself, by means of an awareness.



These narratives, which are defined as a research methodology, explore the personal dimensions of the individual, his affections, relationships, feelings, life trajectories, and self-discovery. As Bosi (2013, p. 48) states, "in life history, to lose time is to lose one's identity, is to lose oneself."

In this journey of not losing yourself/myself, or of finding oneself, it is important to highlight that the moments considered significant for the awareness and production of knowledge based on my life experiences are: a) the separation from my parents - when I finally, as an adult, had the opportunity to meet my biological family on my mother's side and realized that schooling was not part of that context. Going to school was not a priority for them, that means, I wouldn't have studied; b) when my first school experience led me to look for other ways to read and understand reality; c) when I decided to run away from home, still a child, without knowing or being aware of what life on the streets would be like, without knowing what I would find or how I would survive on the streets d) when I decided to stay in the institution, although at that moment I was interested in the plate of food that I would receive every day to kill my hunger and have a safe place to sleep; e) when I had to return to school, already as a resident of the institution, and I didn't give up, even experiencing all the joys and sorrows. All the judgments and absolutions that the official school system presented me with during my first years at school; f) when during the 5th grade of elementary school I received an award as best student in my class and school started to make some sense in my life; g) I realize that, even unconsciously, I had my body shaped by discipline (Zucco, 2023), to learn how to live in harmony with others; h) and when in 1998 I became the first youngster from the institution to complete a technical course and graduate from high school (secondary school in Brazil).

Diving into the past and going through some moments of my life story made me realize that today I am the result of the stories, the lessons, the experiences, and all the people who shared the institutional space with me. The production of knowledge from our personal and professional journey gives meaning to our experiences and leads us to understand our experiential heritage. I believe that understanding our own life story is an important step in understanding the story of others. And I think is this process of (self)knowledge, education is a valuable tool.

I think that looking at my life story and understanding my personal and professional path, through my (auto)narrative, is also a way of producing knowledge based on my



experiences, this makes the narrative a methodology with meaning and reason for me. In this formative process I recognize the fundamental importance of education as an important instrument of transformation and social mobility, giving the school a valuable role: the guarantee of access to universal knowledge, as well as the guarantee of access to citizenship (Correia, 2006). Taking into account that education is a teaching process and "never a pure transmission of objective knowledge or practical skills, but is always accompanied by an ideal of life and a project of society (Savater, 1997, p. 102).

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