Spring 1998

Literacies without judgment: Composing a (con)text for cultural healing in Northeast Brazil

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Literacies without judgment: Composing a (con)text for cultural healing in Northeast Brazil

Abstract
In this study the researcher describes and interprets the experiences with Projeto (Con)texto, a research group created in Northeast Brazil composed of eleven people with different levels of formal schooling, social classes and ages varying from 14 to 50 years old. The researcher explores the dynamics of the Brazilian relational universe and its impact on people’s lives, the multiple forms of letramento (literacies) used by people in a certain cultural context to construe and convey meaning, and the process of strengthening of one’s self to deal with cultural conflicts through cultural healing.

The researcher gathered descriptive data during one year of involved participation with the eleven members of Projeto (Con)texto and formal and informal interviews with them. The researcher had a dual role in this research: first, he was a researcher conducting fieldwork for a doctoral dissertation; and second, he was a social interventionist facilitating a process of cultural change. The approach used for the development of this research qualifies for the category of socially responsive research.

This study helped the participants in Projeto (Con)texto to understand the relational universe in which they live, bringing to a level of awareness why they do what they do in their lives. It prompted participants to liberate themselves from an oppressive culture that determined the passive role which many of them assumed in their cultural context. Projeto (Con)texto helped the participants to gain voice by discovering the roles of reading and writing in their lives and the multiple forms of communication and expression that can be used in their cultural context to construe and convey meaning. Projeto (Con)texto created an opportunity for cultural healing in Northeast Brazil.

Keywords
Education, Philosophy of, Anthropology, Cultural, Psychology, Social

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LITERACIES WITHOUT JUDGMENT:
COMPOSING A (CON)TEXT FOR CULTURAL HEALING
IN NORTHEAST BRAZIL

BY

FRANCISCO SILVA CAVALCANTE JUNIOR

Diploma, Universidade de Fortaleza, 1991
M.Ed., University of New Hampshire, 1994

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor in Philosophy
in
Reading and Writing Instruction

May, 1998
This dissertation has been examined and approved.

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Dr. Thomas Newkirk
Professor of English

April 8, 1998
DEDICATION

To Jane Hansen who helped me to
read my inner text
and
To Dora, Gaia, Ákila, Fernanda, Bela,
Pingo, Maria, Marcia, Alice, Lia and Esperança
who made (Con)texto a place for cultural healing.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The ideas we generate in a dissertation are not only ours. They are part of the many classes we attend, the books we read and the innumerable dialogues, E-mails, faxes and letters we exchange with people who support us throughout the long journey that begins before we feel prepared to start fieldwork. The assistance of Tom Schram, my dissertation director, was invaluable. Tom allowed me to be Brazilian in the United States. He created a context for my self-expression and knowing who I was and where I came from, he helped me to design a study that proved to be meaningful to me and to my culture. Tom and I shared books, articles, and especially, many ideas. I shared with him what it was like to live in the United States and years later he shared with me his experience in living with his family in Brazil. Through his eyes I learned to understand my Brazilian culture better. I hope my interpretations of life in the USA have helped him to see his own culture from a different perspective. In our conversations, Tom shared many times how thankful he was to his dissertation director, Harry Wolcott, and how much he wanted to give me the same guidance he received. Even during the time I was alone writing my dissertation, I felt the presence of Tom in the multiple stories and lessons I recalled from our conversations. His early morning E-mails to
me served as continuous encouragement to never lose my focus or energy to write this dissertation. His guidance was transcultural.

I am also grateful to the other members of my committee. Jane Hansen saved me from dropping out of the Ph.D. program after the death of my father, my aunt and my sister. In one of the several classes I attended which was taught by Jane, I wrote my first poem, with which I open my dissertation. Writing this poem rescued me from a deep depression that dominated me during my first semester in the Ph.D. program in 1994. I found in Jane's class a context for healing. She showed me how to use the little energy still left in my body and to transform it into new energy. She helped me to read my inner text.

Georgia Kerns was my Masters thesis director. She trusted my potential and encouraged me during the difficult years of adaptation in the United States. She made sure that I understood that what I was going through was a cultural shock. Years later, after multiple work visits to Brazil, she understood how hard it was for someone coming from a tropical region of Brazil to adapt to a state like New Hampshire. I am thankful for the many hours Georgia devoted to listening to me in her office.

Tom Newkirk's curiosity prompted me to start writing about Brazilian culture in a class he taught. I was not a talker in the classes I attended, but in his class he gently made sure that I found a space to share my own opinions and
comment on the opinions of my colleagues. Tom introduced me to important books and articles.

Gerald Kelly was a colleague in the Ph.D. program. He was the only student doing work in a foreign country. His encouragement to design a study to be conducted in Brazil helped me immensely to pursue this challenge.

The list would be too long to acknowledge the support I received from professors and staff in the Education Department at the University of New Hampshire. I appreciate their interest, teaching, good advice and encouragement.

I was fortunate to have worked with talented peers who taught me how pleasant learning together can be. The list would also be too long to acknowledge everyone in this paragraph. I thank them all for their support and friendship. However, I cannot omit the support from Kathe Simons, Kathy Staley and Julie Brooks (now Pantano). Kathe introduced me to the world of reading and writing. She was the first person to encourage me to pursue a Ph.D. in this area. Kathy and Julie and their families have become part of my own family.

I thank Elizabeth Lane for her priceless friendship. She knew the right time to say a caring word. Elizabeth taught me that my body cannot function without my spirit. She helped me to take care of my spirit.

Márcio Kildery showed me the power of love. He took care of me during my long hours sitting in front of my computer screen, listened patiently to my late-night ramblings, and
calmed me down with words of encouragement when I was stressed out. He was my constant support at home.

Regina Lúcia, my sister, took care of all my duties as a Brazilian citizen while I was away from the country. She made sure that everything was fine with me both in the USA and Brazil.

D. Bemvinda, my mother, found it difficult to cope with my personal transformations, but continued to provide the support needed for me to continue this study. I will always be grateful for the investment she and my father made in my education.

Prof. Cavalcante, my father, is no longer physically present in my life, but his passion, teachings and hard work have become my driving force. His dream of seeing his Junior become a doctor has come true. From where he is I am sure he is celebrating it with me.

The Brazilian community and "friends of Brazil" in New Hampshire deserve thanks for their support, social entertainment and the Brazilian warmth they provided me during the years away from my culture.

I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Brazilian Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq) for its scholarship for my doctoral studies.
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ABSTRACT

LITERACIES WITHOUT JUDGMENT:
COMPOSING A (CON)TEXT FOR CULTURAL HEALING
IN NORTHEAST BRAZIL

by

Francisco Silva Cavalcante Junior
University of New Hampshire, May, 1998

In this study the researcher describes and interprets the experiences with Projeto (Con)texto, a research group created in Northeast Brazil composed of eleven people with different levels of formal schooling, social classes and ages varying from 14 to 50 years old. The researcher explores the dynamics of the Brazilian relational universe and its impact on people's lives, the multiple forms of letramento (literacies) used by people in a certain cultural context to construe and convey meaning, and the process of strengthening of one's self to deal with cultural conflicts through cultural healing.

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process of cultural change. The approach used for the development of this research qualifies for the category of socially responsive research.

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INTRODUCTION

FROM THE INNER TEXT TO THE OUTER (CON)TEXT

Life
Death
Death
Death
You took away
My father
My aunt
My sister
All in one season

Death
Death
You were in my childhood
You took away
My brother
My sister
You gave me a mission

Pain
You followed me through my boyhood

Pain
I feel you now

Death
I know you are a friend
I know you are my destiny

Life
Please let me enjoy you first

Life
Please show me the joy of freedom

Life
Let me lean on you to free others

- F.S. Cavalcante Junior (1994)
People have asked me what it was like to live in New Hampshire. I have answered: A transformative experience. Images of sex and death, ecstasy and grief, love and loss which persisted in my consciousness for more than twenty years were recalled in a foreign land. More grief, love, loss, death and rebirth marked my life at the University of New Hampshire during the years of Masters and Doctoral studies.

When I set out to conceive Projeto (Con)texto, I reflected upon my own experiences; I looked at my "inner text". Although printed texts have had a strong impact on the work presented in this dissertation, they will never supersede the importance of my own life experiences. The work presented in the following pages was composed by the person I have become.

The experiences of my life have helped me to read my "inner text" and start composing my "outer (con)text". These experiences are psychologically with me to this day. Inevitably, they are interwoven into my work. As F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote,

Mostly, we authors must repeat ourselves—that’s the truth. We have two or three great moving experiences in our lives—experiences so great and moving that it doesn’t seem at the time that anyone else has been caught up and pounded and dazzled and astonished and beaten and broken and rescued and illuminated and reward and humbled in just that way ever before (quoted in Murray 1990, p. 84).
In this dissertation, "healing" is conceptualized as a process of understanding and interpreting why we do whatever we do in our lives when dealing with differences among people and groups. The emphasis in such healing is on the resolution of cultural conflicts that, if not addressed, might lead to self-rejection, hopelessness, unacceptance, hatred and overall disenfranchisement. My own process of healing, in terms of how I came to perceive the Brazilian cultural context, had its origins in my relatively recent exposure to the public school system of my home state of Ceará—an experience I have referred to as "being acquired by the public schools of Northeastern Brazil." Leaving my Brazilian home to come to a strange land engaged me in the process of seeking to understand human behaviors in a Brazilian cultural context, helping me to raise my own cultural self-awareness and to foster my internal harmony (cf. Trueba 1993).

_Projeto (Con)texto_

My primary line of inquiry emerged from a research group created in September of 1996 in Fortaleza, a city of 2.5 million people in Northeast Brazil. The research group, named _Projeto (Con)texto_, met throughout a nine-month period, every other Saturday, for a whole morning, for a total of 60 hours. _Con)texto_ was formed by a diverse group of people from the public educational system, including students, teachers, librarians, school supervisors, adult educators, special educators, people in classrooms and administrators.
My aim in Projeto (Con)texto was to bring together a diverse group of people from the local educational system to explore the social uses and functions of letramento (literacy) in their personal and professional lives. In attempting to understand the social, cultural, economic, and political implications of being literate in a Brazilian context, we uncovered the potential of expressing and comprehending literacy in multiple forms. Central to this process was a stated aim of sharing experiences without fear of judgment by others in the group.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to examine the meaning of ser letrado (being literate) in a Brazilian context where webs of personal relationships play a defining role in people’s daily lives. I explored how educators and students perceived themselves as literate beings and, in turn, how they interpreted their role in relation to other people’s development as literate beings.

This research was ethnographically oriented, in that I attempted to render a “theory of cultural behavior” (Frake 1964, p. 112) that incorporated notions of literacy in a particular social and educational context. The following questions served to orient my inquiry:

(1) To what extent, and to what effect, are the educational experiences and opportunities of study participants defined

(2) How do study participants incorporate notions of literacy into their perceptions of themselves and others?

(3) Through what forms of literacy, and the layering of these forms, do study participants express ideas and identify themselves in relation to others?

(4) What does it mean “to be literate” (ser letrado) in a relational universe?

Dissertation Overview

The names of all participants of Projeto (Con)texto are pseudonyms. They chose their own names and suggested names for each other based on their personal characteristics. Only one of the participants did not choose a name. I named her Esperança.

The body of this study is divided into three sections. Part One sets the theoretical frame and describes methodology. The first chapter draws on anthropological theory of the relational universe of Brazilian culture. Notions of social navigation, identity formation within a relational universe and the jeitinho brasilero are examined. Chapter Two describes the social practices and conceptions of literacies and the foundations for letramento (social literacies studies) in Brazil. Chapter Three presents how the
notion of culture is conceptualized as a central concept in this dissertation and the specifics of methodology.

Part Two describes Projeto (Con)texto in 16 chronological sessions. Each chapter is preceded by an Intertext written by one of the participants highlighting a component of (Con)texto of greater impact for him or her. Chapter Four describes the formation of (Con)texto and its 4 initial sessions. It presents the emergence of voices among the participants and the beginning of a process of collective learning. Chapter Five describes the participants' experiences with multiple forms of text, such as sculpture, and the influence those texts had in helping the participants to understand the meaning of reading in their lives. Chapter Six moves from the perspective of the individual to the impact of (Con)texto, in helping the participants to become readers and composers of the world. A summary session gives the reader an overview of (Con)texto and the transformations the 16 sessions evoked in the participants.

Part Three presents the analysis of this study and considers implications for cultural change. Chapter Seven analyses the categories that emerged from the sessions of (Con)texto and presents the interventions that created the dynamic process of group participation. Chapter Eight considers the implications of this study for cultural change and invites the readers to reflect upon their roles as researchers whose practice should benefit all people involved in the research process. A postscript session written by one
of the participants of (Con)texto presents an update of further implications of this study in one person's life.
PART I

CONCEPTUAL AND CONTEXTUAL ORIENTATION
CHAPTER I

TO BE NOT JUST ANYONE: SOCIAL NAVIGATION IN A RELATIONAL UNIVERSE

Qualquer

E virou pássaro, um pássaro qualquer
Mas ser qualquer, qualquer não queria
De qualquer céu, qualquer freguesia
De acasalar com qualquer cotovia
E virou pássaro, um pássaro qualquer
Filho da lua, da noite e do dia
Bico de nuvem, asa de ventania
Qualquer cantava qualquer melodia
Qualquer virou um pássaro vadio
Sem canto, sem profissão
Sem canto, sem moradia
Qualquer estado civil lhe cabia
Mas ser qualquer, qualquer não queria
E desvirou e virou luz do dia
- Arlindo Araújo

As suggested by the metaphor of the bird, Qualquer, Brazilian society is composed of a mixture of people with and without voice; with and without a profession; with and without a home. To be "just anybody" is the only option for many people in Brazil; it is the preferred option of few. This chapter presents the complex and fascinating universe in

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1Translation: "Anyone"/It turned into a bird, any bird/But to be anyone, it didn't want to be anyone/From any sky, any neighborhood/To mate with any cotovia [type of bird]/And it turned into a bird, any bird/Son of the moon, the night and the day/Beak of a cloud, wing of the wind/Anyone sang any song/Anyone became an indifferent bird/Without voice, without profession/Without place, without home/Any marital status would fit/But to be anyone, it didn't want to be anyone/It turned itself around and became light of day.
which this study was embedded. It explores how challenging it is to be a person in such a relational universe – a universe of somebodies and nobodies who play different roles in the realms of the family ("the house") and in the public arena ("the street").

Within this large country the research group Projeto (Con)texto was conceptualized as an attempt to reflect the heterogeneity of Brazilian society. This dissertation emerges from the experiences generated by this microcosm of a nation which plays a large and increasingly important role in the South American continent.

As the largest country in South America, Brazil represents one of the world’s largest economies and territories, as well as the second largest population in the Western hemisphere. Due to its size, regional contrasts, and demographic diversity, Brazil qualifies for comparisons with other large Western countries such as the United States of America and Canada.

With a democratic constitution and a capitalist economy, Brazil is a Portuguese speaking country, formed by a mixture of cultures. Described by Hess and DaMatta (1995), Brazil is a country where

Catholics also believe in or practice African religions; the political and economic institutions operate through personal relationships as much as general rules; and the music, food, social relations, and—in general—tastes are as deeply shaped by Africa and Native America as by Europe. (p. 2)
According to these authors, "'Diversity' is really not the best word for describing Brazil and Brazilians; 'mixture' is better. Brazil is a nation of the mixing of races (miscegenation), religions (syncretism), and cultures (diasporas, borderlands)" (p. 2).

The Northeast of Brazil

This study is based in the state of Ceará in Northeast Brazil. Rachel de Queiroz, the most prominent writer of Ceará, says, the people in this region are "really special and different, not only from the North but from the rest of Brazil" (Queiroz and Queiroz, 1996, p.121). The ethnic composition of Ceará is among the most pure in the country.

Rachel de Queiroz describes the Northeast as the land of hard working people who fight against the drought seasons and the unexpected floods. It is the land of people who dare to survive. According to her, Northeasterners are known as the Brazilian Jewish - the people who love their land with complete passion and also know when to leave it to survive in other lands. But even when away from the land where they were born, the Northeasterners never forget their origins and always come back, following the inner instinct of love for their roots."Therefore, after the Indians, they are the true natives [of Brazil]" (Queiroz and Queiroz, 1996, p. 124). In the Northeast they do not miss a nation left behind. Their origins started in Northeast Brazil, whereas in other parts of the country, the concentration and influence of immigrants is more extensive. For this reason, diversity in Northeast
Brazil manifests itself more in terms of different levels of schooling, literacy development, and social class than along ethnic lines.

The role different people play in this ethnically homogeneous, but otherwise diverse relational universe, is primary to what will be presented in this chapter and those that follow.

The role of medalhões in Brazil

Relationships play an important role in the creation and function of social order in Brazilian society. DaMatta (1982) explains the distinctions of the Brazilian ideological system:

What distinguishes societies like that of Brazil is the fact they are built on systems of relationships, systems in which the fundamental value is to relate, mix, join, confound, conciliate. To remain always in the middle, to discover mediation and to establish gradation to include (never to exclude), to recapitulate, to synthesize models and positions—these seem to be central aspects of the Brazilian ideological system. (p. 27)

In a relational universe, personal relationships are like links on a chain, each becoming a crucial element to social recognition. Before going to public institutions, Brazilians look for personal connections in the institution or in a friend's chain of relationships to guarantee treatment as "very important people." These so-called "very important people" are considered the medalhões in society. DaMatta (1991) explains,
In Brazilian Portuguese, medalhão means "medallion." The metaphorical association of a supposedly important person with a "medallion" comes from existing engravings with the full head of important figures in many buildings and coins. However, in daily speech, the word "medalhão" designates pejoratively someone who is considered-or assumes-to be important independent of merit. (footnote 12, p. 156)

While more common in the past, the practice continues nowadays, of not giving first consideration to the training and specialty of a person. An interview starts by someone asking about who your father, mother or relatives were. If some of them were "important people" you are at an advantage. Who you are will be inferred from what your relatives or family generations did. "It is always important to recall the memories of your father," I was reminded by a Brazilian professor at a university. "His name can open doors to you." The secret to success in Brazil has a long history.

The "Teoria do Medalhão" or the "theory of the big shot" was first presented by the Brazilian writer Machado de Assis in 1882. In one of his essays, he published a dialogue between a father and a son. When the son turned 21 the father revealed to him that the secret to success in society is to become a medalhão (a "big shot") (DaMatta, 1991). Who becomes a medalhão in Brazil? In any group of people, among the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak, someone can become a very important person or a medalhão, by "transcend[ing] the rules that constrain and govern the ordinary person in any given social sphere" (DaMatta, 1991, p. 158). Medalhões,
therefore, are skilled people who know which tools need to be used in a given social situation: knowing when to write a letter, make a phone call or place an invitation to meet in person.

As presented in the following section, people who are considered to be *medalhões* can use their tools and skills either to facilitate the social navigation of others or to benefit themselves.

**Social Navigation: The Brazilian Jeitinho**

An important Brazilian way to facilitate social navigation and to transcend the rules is known as the *jeitinho brasileiro*. Barbosa (1995) explains,

There is no precise translation in English for this idiomatic Brazilian expression. It can be defined, in a very broad sense, as a fast, efficient, and last-minute way of accomplishing a goal by breaking a universalistic rule and using instead one's informal social or personal resources. (p. 36)

The *jeitinho brasileiro* can serve in a positive or negative way to facilitate social navigation depending on whose purpose it will serve. In order to clarify the meaning of this expression I will give some examples:

During a visit to a private school in the Northeast of Brazil, Brazilian and North American educators had the chance for the first time to see the inside of an exclusive private school. Only prospective students, their families and invited guests were allowed free access to the school, and then only
by appointment. The visit that day became possible through the *jeitinho brasileiro* of a native from Brazil, whose relative was an assistant administrator in the school. Not only were all the facilities of the school visited, but the headmaster himself took the time to tour the entire school with his guests. Normally, a secretary or school coordinator was responsible for tours.

Another *jeitinho brasileiro* was used to mediate a *dialogue* between representatives of the private and the public school systems. During a visit to a private school in the Northeast of Brazil, a group of Brazilian public educators and a North American professor met with the staff of the private school to find out about their successful integration of students with special needs in regular classrooms. For the same meeting, the staff of the city special education division was invited. Normally the systems of private and public schools work separately from each other and *dialogue* between the two systems is very rare. To avoid rejection, the staff of the private school was not informed that the staff of the public system would attend the meeting, until the moment they arrived at the site of the meeting. A productive discussion emerged from the first *dialogue* between the two separate groups.

In another instance, a Brazilian professor, a friend of a Brazilian native who studied in the United States, wished to
spend her sabbatical semester in a North American university doing research in her field of study. This professor's limited fluency in English would be a barrier to acceptance to a university using the regular procedures, since a score of 550 in the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is required. A North American professor was contacted and agreed to serve as an advisor for the Brazilian professor for a semester. The two professors were pleased with the experience and the barrier imposed by the lack of fluency in English was overcome with the help of translators and the Brazilian professor's own efforts to learn English while immersed in an English speaking country.

In these examples, the jeitinho brasileiro had positive outcomes benefiting all parties involved. In other situations, the jeitinho brasileiro is used for self-promotion or fulfillment of one's personal needs, such as finding ways to bypass a law or offering professionals important positions at a government job solely on the basis of family connections.

The presentation of the jeitinho brasileiro is an important concept for this dissertation because it emphasizes that in Brazil the general norms of society or the legal system do not exist in the same way for everybody. The jeitinho is a means to be "more" (more privileged, more important, more influential) than other people. To guarantee smooth social navigation in Brazilian society, successful

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users of jeitinhos have more chances to get what they want or to reach the positions they desire. There are languages (oral, written, gestural, etc.) used to convey the message or essence of a jeitinho. A simple wink of an eye to a teller at a bank might mean "come here to the backdoor and deposit this check for me so that I don't have to wait in line."

Understanding the multiple languages used to communicate and express meanings in Brazilian society is at the core of this dissertation. The more languages you know, the more chances you will find to succeed in this complex, relational universe.

**Being a "somebody" and being a "nobody"**

In Brazil, the individual without relations is considered a marginal human being, someone isolated from a group, who is at risk of staying an individual or a "nobody" if a medalhão is not found to mediate his or her navigation in the public arena. Family ties and bonds also play an important role in this relational universe, determining whether one is regarded as a connected 'person' (a "somebody") or an anonymous 'individual' (a "nobody").

The notion of family is one of the key elements in the Brazilian culture. The place where you are born, your home, your house, in large part determine who you become. As soon as you are born you carry your family name and, most importantly, your family web of personal relationships (DaMatta, 1991). In Brazil, the friends you have and the persons you know carry more weight than your profession or
degrees; simply stated, who you know is more important than what you know. People with whom you have personal relationships become especially important mediators in the public arena.

Most children born in Brazil receive a family name. Some do not have a family, and are literally born on the street. This distinction between the home and the street—and, by implication, between the "named" person (the "somebody") and the anonymous individual (or the "nobody")—is very significant in Brazilian society. Children are born persons, but are immediately transformed into anonymous individuals when the "those-who-can-survive" world of the public arena is faced. In Brazil's relational society, these people tend to remain anonymous. Very few achieve success or find a patron or medalhão, that will help them to transform their status from individual to person.

The most fortunate children, born in a family rich in personal relations, can be made to feel like anonymous individuals when the world of the street is faced, but not for long. In a new job, for example, a person can be made to feel like an individual initially, but promotion and success within the institution will allow him to resume his identity as a "connected" person again. Roberto DaMatta (1991) carefully explains the implications of these two worlds:

At home Brazilians are subject to the rigid code of love and respect for family, a group seen as inevitable and inescapable, in which one is a perpetual dependent and in which one's individuality is frequently dissolved. Our social ethics tells us

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that one "owes everything" to this group, because in it we learn to be "someone" (alguém) and to become a person (uma pessoa). [...] The realm of the street is just quite the opposite. Here the individual is torn loose from the moral group and thereby subjected to the impersonal codes of traffic, of supply and demand, and of all levels of government. It is a hostile world almost always devoid of hierarchy and complementarity. (p. 88)

"A strong relationship with a mediator" writes DaMatta (1991), "makes it possible for us to be treated in special terms, even when we do not belong to any elite or prestigious family" (p. 191). A mediator can help previously unacknowledged individuals to become known by the important work in which they engage. To find people who are willing to serve as mediators is not an easy task in a relational (but, at the same time, hierarchical) society in which the rich do things for the poor, but the poor continue to be the poor. Most often, the "doctors" (e.g., anyone with a bachelor's degree in Brazil) or the literate beings (seres letrados) are the ones to support individuals to move beyond the "nobody" position to a position where their talents and strengths can at least be valued and validated.

To exemplify the notions of the house and the street, I will present an example from the Brazilian context that illustrates the related notions of the person and the individual. In a conference for educators and health care professionals, the director of special education for a large city in Northeast Brazil invited a teacher from a public school to co-present with her. The director was a well-known
person (a "somebody") due to the work she did and the position of power she carried within the Ministry of Education. In contrast, the public school teacher was as people say in Brazil, a "nobody." The teacher, officially a lay teacher, and a member of a low social class, went on the stage and presented a beautiful lecture on teaching students with special educational needs in a regular school. At that moment, the teacher "became" a named person. She will always be remembered for the message she shared with an audience of almost 200 teachers and health care professionals.

This teacher had been attending training programs in special education for over one year. In an informal dialogue with me, she shared how the validation of her work by the Brazilian and North American trainers gave her the confidence she needed to trust her work and share it with a large audience. She needed mediators to help her safely enter the other world (i.e., a world in which she was a connected person), and as DaMatta (1991) says, "This usually requires the explicit use of mediators...[because] direct contact [with the world] would bring the immediate risk of improper or disrespectful treatment..." (p. 191). This public school teacher would have never been invited directly by the conference organizers. Instead, the director of special

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2Lima, E. (1994) defines lay teachers: "Lay teachers are teachers who have not gone through all the years of required schooling to get a teaching certificate. (The minimum education to get a certificate is eight years of basic schooling and four years of magistério.)" (p. 240) A high school student can become a teacher in Brazil when they attend a curso pedagógico, which will allow them to teach the elementary school grades. This public school teacher has a curso pedagógico certificate.
education was invited, and, in her role as a mediator, invited one of her public school teachers to be a co-presenter with her.

School Navigation: the jeitinho brasileiro in education

Early in the 1920s, Brazilian writer Lima Barreto wrote a fictional account of a nation he named República dos Bruzundangas which bears many similarities with the Brazil of today. In Bruzundanga "there are several kinds of schools financed by the general government, by the provincial government and the privates ones" (Lima Barreto, 1923, p. 49). In Brazil of the 1990s there are the federal, public and private schools. There are very few federal schools and these are the technical schools or the military schools.

School navigation, another jeitinho brasileiro to guarantee school achievement or to avoid school failure, was seen in Lima Barreto's nation. In his novel, "the children of powerful people" (p. 49) or using DaMatta's terms, the Brazilian 'persons,' convinced their parents to influence the school system to guarantee their success. In the fictitious nation some students were aware, for example, that,

[I]n the province of Jazidas, the elementary mathematics exams are easier. What do they do? They register for the exams from there, [pass] and return with the certificates of admission [being able to transfer into more privileged schools]. They continue these maneuvers for the whole superior course [college degree]. In some schools, the exams for some subjects are easier. There they go to those schools, attend the year, memorize the topics, do the exams and [when they get their grades] return quickly to the more famous school or college, to receive their degrees from them. (Lima Barreto, 1923, pp. 49-50)
In 1995, three months before the end of the academic year, three first year high school students from a private school in Northeast Brazil realized they would have to repeat that year if they stayed in the school until the end of the year. What did they do? They convinced their parents, persons with a good network of relationships, to transfer them to a public school for the last three months of the year. Without barriers, they were accepted in a public school and due to the easy exams in that school they passed and finished the first year of high school. In 1996, they transferred back to the private school where they entered the second year of high school.

The competition to study at medical schools in Brazil is high. In August of 1997, the newspapers of Fortaleza denounced the jeitinhos of some students from Fortaleza who found the exams of medical schools easier in other states of the Northeast. However, their goal was to transfer to the most exclusive medical school in Fortaleza. All the students needed to do was to find a politician who would hire them as "political assistants," and the law guaranteed the right for the students to request transfer to the university in the

1Adriana de Oliveira Lima (1994) found out in her research that the contents taught in public schools "seemed to be reduced (quantitatively) and restricted (the amplitude and depth of what is taught)." She gives an example of the science curriculum for the same grades, "in the private schools it is related to the notion of the universe, the geographical locations (space and time), whereas, in the public schools the notion of hygiene and health is predominant (a desire of cleanness of the popular classes, that are obviously perceived as dirty)"(125). Therefore one can understand why exams are easier in public schools for the students who came from the private school.
town where they were given the "job." As a result of the transfers, 140 students have been transferred in 6 years to the school of medicine at the Federal University of Fortaleza. Classrooms have become overcrowded, diminishing the quality of education expected at the university. For the journalist Márcia Gurgel this is an injustice to those students who passed the exams with higher grades and in a more difficult level of competition. But there is something called "força de lei" (law power) that in Brazil is unequal. Gurgel (1997) concludes, "either the law is too benevolent or the interpretation given to the law facilitates things to happen." Common people would never have their request for transference accepted. However, as Hess and DaMatta (1995) say, the laws in Brazil are established to constrain or control those who are isolated, anonymous, or deserving of impersonal treatment. In contrast, positive consideration and privileges are accorded to those who are inserted in a web of personal relationships and dependencies. There is no doubt that the old Brazilian maxim is still current: "Aos inimigos, a lei; aos amigos, tudo!" (To our enemies, the law; to our friends, everything!).

These privileged students will be the ones that in the future, as the "doutores da sociedade," will be ruling the lives of individuals in the public sector of society. Because they are so immersed in the private world, they can forget that there is a major part of society which lives without a

*doctors of society (people with only a bachelor's degree who are called doctors)*
network of relationships. The "persons" of Brazil tend to benefit their equals—their friends and relatives. These become the "espertos" of Brazilian society, people who take advantage of jeitinhos brasileiros for self-benefit or for the benefit of their relatives.

In the República dos Bruzundangas of Lima Barreto (1923), "[Wise] is not the [person]... that assimilated previous knowledge and works to increase it through their own individual work. It is not this notion of wisdom people have in this country. [...] Wise is the one who writes books with the opinion of others" (p. 119). While presenting a lecture, for example, the more one refers to other people's ideas, the wiser one is regarded. It is not important to convey an understanding of the idea, just repeat it and listeners will be impressed by the beautiful and incomprehensible words one uses. Very few people dare to question the "doutores" about their points of view. If asked, one might expect to hear a very traditional expression "Você sabe com quem está falando?!" typical of presumptuous people, a behavior early identified by Brazilian writer Érico Veríssimo (1946). This expression "is a forceful rejection of 'not knowing'..." (DaMatta, 1991, p. 150). Brazilian families and schools teach their children to become mere recipients of information rather than questioners of knowledge. As DaMatta says, we are taught "not to ask too many questions because to do so is

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'smart people who find easy ways to navigate socially.
"Do you know who you're talking to?!" For a detailed explanation of the implication of this Brazilian expression see chapter 4 in DaMatta (1991).
impolite or is perceived as a crude form of aggressiveness to be used only when we want 'to put someone down'" (p. 151). In the house and the street Brazilians are taught to avoid saying "I don't know" to a question. It is more appropriate to make up an answer than to take the risk of appearing ignorant.

In summary

Notions of the house and the street, the person and the individual developed by Brazilian anthropologist Roberto DaMatta are crucial for the reader who is not familiar with a relational framework, in order to understand the role of relationships in Brazilian society. More often in the past, but still now, Brazilian and foreign researchers have tried to explain the contrasts of Brazil using dualistic frameworks of research, where one is either rich or poor, goes to private or public institutions. DaMatta (1995) explains this misconception by saying,

We must think of Brazilian society as a process of mediation between poles and not, as has been the practice, construe our reality as having but a 'dualistic rationale.' We have been using an individualized epistemology to study a reality that functions relationally. . . . (p. 281)

Hess and DaMatta (1995) argue persuasively that, many researchers do not understand the relational framework of Brazil. Instead they try to interpret it within the framework of individualistic societies like the United States. Needless to say, in cases where a framework different from the
relational is used to explain Brazilian culture, the interconnected web of relationships is transformed into a thread with only two poles, which does not convey the mixture of cultures that make Brazil.

In the Brazilian cultural context, where the distances between categories (i.e., the person and the individual) seem so wide and webs of personal relationships play so defining a role in people's lives, the meaning people attach to the notion of letramento (literacy) becomes crucial.
CHAPTER II

LETRAMENTO: A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONS AND CONCEPTIONS OF READING, WRITING AND COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICES

The great divide in literacy is not between those who can read and write and those who have not yet learned how to. It is between those who have discovered what kinds of literacy society values and how to demonstrate their competencies in ways that earn recognition. (p. 9)

Margaret Meek, On Becoming Literate

As Cyrene Wells (1996) has written, "the meaning we attach to literacy, the expectations we hold for it and the value we give it are largely dependent on the context in which it takes place." Like Wells, other researchers have presented their discontent with the reductionist notion of literacy that narrows it down to the acquisition of certain standard communicative strategies, such as precision in usage, decontextualization of information and careful weighing of words (Voss 1996; Brown, 1991, 1995; Giroux, 1992; Gallego & Hollingsworth, 1992; Eisner, 1994, 1991; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1982). "If we view the world as a text," Giroux (1992) writes,

then literacy means engaging the full range of what is in the library (conventional notions of reading), the art gallery (the making and interpretation of
The notion that the reading of the word is preceded by knowledge of the world was first presented by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. His pedagogy emerges from his own experiences of entering school at the age of 15, when he was already able to read the world and words (see Freire, 1993). Like Wells (1996) and Giroux (1992), Freire (in Freire & Macedo, 1987) reminds us that,

We cannot conduct literacy work outside the world of culture because education in itself is a dimension of culture. Education is an act of knowledge (knowledge here is not to be restricted to a specific object only) on the part of the very subject who knows. (pp. 51-52)

Influenced by Paulo Freire and those who share this more encompassing notion of literacy, new studies have broadened the notion of literacy. Wells in her recent book, *Literacies Lost* (1996) also emphasizes the importance of considering the multiple facets that are related with school and classroom cultures that have a direct impact on the literate behavior of students.

The shift from words to more diverse forms of communication and expression starts to emerge as the result of broadening the notion of literacy. This broader notion of literacy does not disregard the importance of words, but it welcomes other forms of composition of the world, including art, improvisation, movement, music, sound, and writing.
Donald Graves (1996), in his foreword to *Hidden Literacies*, writes,

Voss taught me that our definition of literacy needs to be broadened. Schools are centered in words. There is no question that words are important, but they are only one manifestation of intelligence. By focusing on words to the exclusion of other modes of expression, we prevent masses of children from making valuable contributions to schools and to our communities. (pp. xi-xii)

Rexford Brown's (1995) definition of literacy exemplifies the various components encompassed by the broader notion of literacy. For him, literacy includes the reading and writing of multiple forms of language: computer, mathematical, music, dance, visual arts, spatial and gestural. A literate person is a good user of multiform languages to describe the world they live in and to express their thoughts and feelings.

The broadest definition of literacy invites us to use the plural noun, *literacies*. Margaret Voss's frustrations as a teacher who didn't know about her students' other ways of knowing and relating outside the school, encouraged her to pursue a notion of literacies (Voss, 1996). She used this term to refer to the multiple ways people make and convey meaning purposefully not only in words, but also through the arts, performance, carpentry and other forms of communication and expression.

As an advocate for broadening the notion of literacy, Voss reflects on the discourse found in the United States of
America which asks schools to play the role of teaching children to be literate and to welcome diversities. But at the same time, these schools value only certain literacies, devaluing those with competencies to express themselves through different forms of communication and expression. To be literate can be perceived in broader terms if we value the etymological meaning of the word literacy presented by Eisner (1991):

[Literacy] relates to "tongue"; to be literate is to be able to do what the tongue makes possible: to speak, to inscribe language into text, and to decode text in order to secure the meanings embedded within it. To be literate in America is to be able to construe or express meaning in written language. [...] Literacy can be conceived of as the ability to decode or encode meaning in any of the social forms through which meaning is conveyed. (p. 120)

The multiple character of literacy practices challenges the dominant view of a single Literacy with a capital "L" and a single "y". The pluralistic notion of literacy - literacies - does not exclude the conventional notions of reading and writing, but rather includes the reading and composition of other languages such as the language of music, dance and the visual arts.

Reading the World

Illiteracy in Brazil remains a major challenge. In Paulo Freire's opinion, illiteracy is an act of violence against human rights that prevents the illiterate people from liberating themselves from the oppressive forces that want to keep them illiterate (Freire & Macedo, 1995).
Paulo Freire believed that teaching students to read goes beyond the coding and decoding of words; it also involves the "reading of the world" (Freire, 1985; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Reading the world becomes an invitation to understanding the hidden components of a society - its culture, represented in the cultural assumptions, goals, values, beliefs, and communicative modes of a group of people (see chapter 3 for fuller exploration of this concept).

Paulo Freire's notion of alfabetização (print literacy) was an important contribution to the new emerging field of letramento in Brazil. He believed that through the process of alfabetização the illiterate individual would be able to develop a critical consciousness of the world, enabling the illiterate and the oppressed to explore and analyze the sources of their oppression. Literacy classes would begin with the discussion of a theme in the local context, such as 'fome' (hunger). The animador (literally, animator, or more commonly, motivator or facilitator) would discuss with the group members what such themes mean in their context, why such conditions exist, the people responsible for the creation of such conditions, and so forth. Once the learners became familiarized with the critical sense of the words generated, the animator would write them down. In Portuguese, words are built up in syllables so that a word such as 'fome' can be broken down into parts and then each part -'fo-me'-rebuilt with other syllables to create new words. Students would learn to copy the letters of the generated words and
then create their own new words, moving on to sentence building.

Brian Street, a British researcher in the field of "social literacies," believes that the Freirean approach can be culturally manipulated by "activists imbued with the ideological fervor and believing so strongly that they are 'empowering' 'ignorant' peasants" that they might fail to look at their own cultural and political values that are being imposed on their students (Street, 1995, p. 138). In Street's perspective, Paulo Freire "has tended to believe that people without western-type literacy are unable to 'read the world'" (Street, 1995, p. 21). Freire's notion of literacy did not take into consideration the multiple forms of literacies that the so called "illiterates" use to communicate and express their thoughts in their local contexts. He believed that in order to be literate and have a critical consciousness one needs to master the skills of reading and writing words predominant in the western world.

The Foundations of *Letramento* in Brazil

The Portuguese word *letramento* is a direct translation from the English word literacy and is not yet found in the Brazilian dictionaries of Portuguese. The first reference to the word *letramento* was made in Kato (1986, p. 7). Os *Significados do Letramento* edited by Brazilian researcher Angela Kleiman (1995) and *Letramento e Alfabetização* by Leda Tfoundi (1995) were the first books published specifically on *letramento* in Brazil. *Letramento* has a very short history in
Brazil and research in this area is at the seminal stages. This new area of study, drawing from the fields of education and linguistics, has been created to differentiate studies on the social impact of literacies from studies of alfabetização (print literacy).

The process of alfabetização emphasizes the individual competencies of reading, writing and language practices. These competencies are normally acquired through formal schooling and instruction. On the other side, letramento is concerned with the social-historical impact of reading, writing and the multiple forms of language present in a culture. In contrast to alfabetização, the focus of letramento is not only on the use of words in reading and writing, it goes beyond words to include the multiple ways people use to communicate and express meaning in a certain cultural context. Accordingly, a print illiterate person (analfabeto) can be literate (letrado) in other forms of letramento.

Significant advances are taking place in our understanding of letramento in Brazil through the contributions of scholars from the fields of anthropology and social psychology. The meanings attached to literacy are culture specific: "its definition depends on what people, at any given place and time, take for granted as the usual things to do with reading and writing" (Meek, 1992, p. xi). Letramento calls for a wider understanding of the uses,
perceptions and masteries of literacies as communicative practices.

The view of literacy as communicative practice has gained considerable ground in contrast to the traditional understanding of literacy as a simple set of decoding and encoding skills. Several scholars have contributed to an understanding of the social nature of literacies and the multiple character of literacy practices (Scribner and Cole 1981; Heath 1983; Street 1984, 1993 a,b, 1995; Grillo 1989; Kleiman 1995; Tfouni 1995).

Street's notion of "autonomous" and "ideological" approaches to literacy has been acknowledged as an important foundation of letramento in Brazil (Kleiman, 1995). Street terms "autonomous" those understandings of literacy as a technical skill to be attained independent of its social context. In the "autonomous" model, literacy is confined to its technical and mechanical aspects. People with this view of reading and writing believe that a literate person is someone who writes well, has a vast vocabulary and is able to spell words without making spelling mistakes. Considering this view of literacy to be inappropriate, Street believes that the conceptualization of literacy is "ideological" in nature, looking at literacy practices "as inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in a given society" (Street, 1995, p.161). He suggests that teachers "need to move beyond teaching children about the technical features of language 'functions' and help them instead towards awareness of the
socially and ideologically constructed nature of the specific forms we inhabit and use at given times" (Street, 1995, p. 6). The "ideological" model does not deny the technical and cognitive skills of reading and writing, but includes them as part of a broader cultural whole. The ideological model proposed by Street does not exclude the work undertaken by the autonomous model, rather it expands the aspects that need to be considered when studying literacy practices in a social context.

Starting with Heath's (1982) definition of literacy event as "occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies" (p. 50), Street created "literacy practices" as a broader concept. Pitched at a higher level of abstraction, literacy practices refer to both literate behavior and conceptualizations in the use of reading and/or writing in a cultural context. Literacy practices encompass not only 'literacy events,' proposed by Heath (1982), "as empirical occasions to which literacy is integral, but also 'folk models' of those events and the ideological preconceptions that underpin them" (Street, 1995, p.162). Extending this notion even further, Grillo (as quoted in Street, 1995) describes the concept of "communicative practices" as:

'the social activities through which language or communication is produced', 'the way in which these activities are embedded in institutions, settings or domains which in turn are implicated in other, wider, social, economic, political and cultural
processes' and 'the ideologies, which may be linguistic or other, which guide processes of communication production.' (p. 163)

Central to the development of the concept of communicative practices is the notion of "context." As noted in Street (1995), some linguists (e.g., Chomsky, 1986 quoted in Street, 1995) have been reluctant to consider the notion of context in their studies, arguing that it is so "unbounded and loose that it would swamp their own very precise and bounded studies" (p. 163). These linguists believe that in order to talk about the social aspects of language there is no need for an academic rigor. However, the understanding of the domain of "context" is key to this inquiry, having given the name to the research group Projeto (Con)texto - which will be discussed in the following chapters.

**Defining Leitramento**

Unlike research accounts which focus on discrete elements of reading and writing skills, this study addresses the category of "social literacies" (Street, 1995) which has expanded considerably in recent years due to contributions from the field of anthropology and cross-cultural research (e.g., Street 1993b; Prinsloo and Breier, 1996). This dissertation concentrates on the understanding of literacies - the social practices and conceptions of reading, writing and language - in a Brazilian cultural context.

My conceptualization of leitramento in Brazil draws attention to the creative and original ways in which
participants of Projeto (Con)texto use their literacies to communicate their own concerns, feelings, thoughts and interests in response to multiple readings of their worlds. Considering the mix of cultures presented in the previous chapter, orality and literacy within the Brazilian context must also be considered in their relationship as aspects of the same continuum. As a result of this mixture of literate and oral channels of communication, Brazilian culture is rich in examples of people who compose their realities through handicrafts, music, dance, literatura de cordel (string literature), painting and many other forms of cultural manifestations. In this sense, letramento is the process of reading the daily world - the interior and exterior worlds of each human being - and the composition of these readings through the use of multiple languages to re-present meaning:

Audio language: the language of music, sound effects, natural sounds and performative instruments.

Bodily language: the language of the body, gestures, feelings, kinesics and behavior.

Linguistic language: the language of the sounds, rhythms, inflections, and meters of words.

Spatial language: the language of visual perception and observation.

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The notion of representation through the use of multiple languages I am presenting here borrows from the notion of human multiple intelligences conceptualized by Howard Gardner (1983, 1991 and 1993).
Spiritual language: the language of the instinct, visualization, sensitivity to communication with the human and spiritual spheres.

Visual language: the language of colors, perspective, icons, textures, shapes, and the multiple art forms.

Multiform language: the language of integrated forms of representations such as in the electronic multimedia texts.

The Letramento of Common People

The Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre in an introduction to the *Antologia da Literatura de Cordel* (1982), writes,

Brazil, cannot be defined as culture, considering only the discourses pronounced at its letters, philosophy and sciences academies or at the universities. It is also defined by the stories told in spontaneous, rough, non-standard, but expressive Portuguese. By spontaneous songs also: even the songs of the illiterate. By its popular wisdom, presented, many times, in a surprisingly intuitive and imaginative way. (p. xix)

From the mouths of common people much wisdom has been spoken. The stories told by common people composed the universal book *Dom Quixote* by Cervantes, which serves as an example of the importance of listening to people's stories.

In Brazil many common people became writers who interpreted the national reality through the stories collected directly from people. This has been happening since José de Alencar, contributed much to making the Portuguese language more Brazilian, along with José Lins do Rego and
Rachel de Queiroz, and not forgetting Simões Lopes Neto who wrote *O Negrinho do Pastoreio*.

In Ceará, the social poet Patativa do Assaré, who only had four months of formal schooling at the age of 12, is a great example of a common person who conveys in writing the harsh and honest reality of Brazilian society, the reality of the Northeastern sertão [hinterlands] and the myths of the sertanejos (people from the sertão). In his poem "Cante Lá que Eu Canto Cá" (Sing there that I sing here), Patativa do Assaré (1992, pp.25-26) demonstrates the importance of the knowledge acquired from his personal experiences in the rural areas and addresses the urban educated person by saying,

If in there you had education, 
Here, God taught me everything, 
Without needing a book, 
Please don't trouble here, 
That I also don't trouble there, 
Sing there that I sing here. 
You had education, 
You learned much science, 
But from the things of the sertão [Hinterland], 
You have no experience. 
You never made a shack, 
Never worked in the wild, 
You cannot know well, 
Because in this hard life, 
Only those who tasted the food,
Sabe o gosto que ela tem. Know the flavor it has.

The poet Patativa do Assaré was born in 1909 in Ceará. He is the author of 3 books and hundreds of folhetos de cordel (string literature poems) and poems published in magazines and newspapers. At the University of Sorbonne he is studied in the discipline of Universal Popular Literature. Patativa is a reader of the world who composes his reality in writing and in music.

The Brazilian print literate population must recognize and value the potential of all its literate people. It is possible to be literate without being print literate. There is no doubt that in our society there is greater exclusion for those people who are literate without being print literate. As presented before, even Paulo Freire believed that only print literate people were able to develop the critical consciousness and therefore the logical thinking to operate in society. Research on literacies is changing the scenario of valuing only one kind of literacy, and is expanding it to welcome multiple forms of communication and representation in a cultural context.

Stories in verse: A Northeastern Form of Letramento

Of the multiple forms of literacies found in Northeast Brazil, the folhetos or literatura de cordel (pamphlets or string literature) is an important representation of the local culture. In this region, people express their ideas and thoughts by the means of arts, music, dance, writing and
other forms of literacies. The composition of a *cordel* includes the printing of a *xilogravura* (an illustration printed from a wood carving) for the cover and the writing of verses expressive of the voice of the common person.

The *literatura de cordel* provide a documentation of actual historical events and people's attitudes towards the daily life of Brazilian society. For almost one hundred years, the *literatura de cordel* has been the reading and writing channel of communication and expression of the lower classes in the Brazilian Northeast. While an edition of a book in Brazil prints no more than three thousand copies, many *folhetos* can reach an edition of ten thousand.

The name *literatura de cordel* comes from the way the booklets were suspended from lines stretched between trees or two posts. The word *cordel* means string. The *folheto* or booklet of *cordel* is normally four by six-and-a-half inches with approximately 16 to 32 newspaper-weight pages. The cover generally bears a *xilogravura*, an illustration printed from a wood carving. The themes vary according to what is happening in society. It is believed that the *cordel* was the first kind of newspaper before the invention of today's newspaper, radio or television.

The language in which these *folhetos* are written is typically Northeastern. The writers use the language they hear from the people. Because of the use of people's non-standard language in its text, the *literatura de cordel* is considered to be a popular kind of literature.
The majority of the writers of cordel are people with little formal schooling. They write from their hearts without paying attention to grammar rules. Manoel Caboclo, poet from Ceará, says that the reason for using the name string literature is because the work is done with the strings of the poet's heart. They write what they feel, see, and comes from inside of them.

The stories written in the folhetos can be romantic, realistic, critic, informative or questioning. They present the daily news of what is happening in the world around the poet, who interprets what he sees and feels through the cordel language. The folhetos can be used to celebrate or criticize the events of life.

The cordel writers are an excellent example of people who read their world and compose their interpretations through this unique vehicle of letrameto. The literatura de cordel is an art originated from the people, and is used to compose and reveal the fascinating world of popular thinking and imagination to the people.

As is the case with the majority of writers in Brazil, cordel authors are constantly facing financial restraints. In public readings they appeal to their listeners to reward their efforts by buying a copy of their folheto. The poet's pride and need to make a living are also written in their stories. In the conclusion of his story Grande Debate entre Lampião e São Pedro (Great Debate Between Lampião and Saint Peter) José Pacheco wrote (as quoted in Slater, 1989):
Poeta tem liberdade
Sagrado dom da natura
Conforme a literatura
Escreve o que tem vontade
Também a propriedade
Precisa o dono ter
Pelo menos vou dizer
Se meu espírito não mente
Poeta também é gente
Também precisa comer

The poet has the freedom to write about whatever inspires him as a sacred gift of nature. Property, however, always has an owner, and so I tell you in all honesty that the poet has to eat like any other human being.

The poets are always open to their readers' ideas. A simple question about a specific subject can serve as a stimulus for the production of a new folheto on that theme. The authors of cordel are open to take in the world.

Guaipuan Vieira, a poet from Fortaleza, has become interested in Letramento after some conversations with me. One day he asked me for copies of what I had written on this subject. A couple of weeks later he handed me a new cordel written on letramento:

IN THE LETRAMENTO WAVE
Author: Guaipuan Vieira
I gave time to my thoughts to develop some wings and in the imaginative world to polish some good verses giving to this poet his preferred rime created in verses by the muse.
Que nem ar pra respirar
Ela chega a contento
O assunto está presente
Não fujo dele um momento
Para o leitor eu descrevo
Por pesquisar o acervo
Que fala de LETRAMENTO.

Neste estudo fique atento
Leia a minha narração
Com certeza se inteirando
Terá outra posição.
Valores estão perdidos
Por não serem instruídos
Quanto à valorização.

Ele está na multidão
Me refiro ao LETRAMENTO
Seu conceito social
É em busca do talento
Seja a pessoa letrada
Ou não alfabetizada
Estuda o comportamento.

Faz muito aproveitamento
Estudando o ser cristão
É letrado o cordelista
E o manual artesão
Da mesma forma o pintor
Na música o compositor
Cada um grande expressão.
Faz parte da educação que o LETRAMENTO estuda e das ciências linguísticas. Pois nas letras nada muda, o letrado não enrola. Fora ou dentro da escola, está vivo não se iluda. Quem multiplica as palavras, as formas sempre mudando. É uma pessoa letrada, tá seu talento exaltando. Também conquista a bagagem, enriquecendo a linguagem. Por está sempre estudando.

LETRAMENTO é tudo isto, expressão de pensamento. Tá no gesto, fala ou escrita. Outras áreas toma assento: De política ou social, econômica ou cultural. Revelando o bom talento.

Este termo LETRAMENTO no Brasil ele é recente. Só na década de oitenta, se tornou bem atraente para alguns estudiosos e professores famosos, que nos mostra este presente.
Nesta época Mary Kato
Fez do nome citação
Foi *No Mundo da Escrita*
Livro de aceitação
Que pela primeira vez
Neste país altivez
Registrou esta expressão.

No ano noventa e cinco
Ângela Kleiman escreveu
Este estudo num só livro
A didática ofereceu
Subsídios pra a História
Considerada vitória
Pra quem tanto defendeu.

A propagação foi rápida
No Nordeste brasileiro
Fortaleza por exemplo
O "O POVO" foi pioneiro
Lançou *(CON)*TEXTO, Projeto,
Por ser jornal predileto
E lido no mundo inteiro

Bom tempero de cultura
Para ninguém reclamar
Aos sábados de manhã
Ele chega em cada lar
E toda família unida
Neste estudo dá guarida
Por ser muito exemplar.

At this time Mary Kato
made a citation of this name
in the "World of Writing"
a book of good acceptance
it was the first time
in this country that this expression was used.

In the year ninety five
Ângela Kleiman wrote
this study in a book
she presented the methodology
a resource for History
considered to be a victory
for a good defender.

It was fast the propagation
in the Northeast of Brazil
in Fortaleza, for example
the "O POVO" was a pioneer
it launched *(CON)*TEXTO, the project
because it is the preferred newspaper
which is read in the whole world

Good seasoning of culture
that no one can complain
on Saturday mornings
it reaches every home
and all the family united
gives attention to this study
because it of reference.
Na consultoria de "O POVO" Friso bem de LETRAMENTO Doutor Cavalcante Junior Neste estudo está atento Há também Regina Stela U 'a Professora singela De rico assessoramento. LETRAMENTO ou "LITERACY" Que no inglês é chamado Tradução: "leitura e escrita" Fique disso bem informado Pois vive no nosso meio Não está o vocábulo alheio Mas muito bem, obrigado.

At "O POVO" Consultancy I emphasize in LETRAMENTO Doctor Cavalcante Junior who is alert to this study and also Regina Stela a humble teacher of rich assistance.

LETRAMENTO or "LITERACY" that in English it is called which translation is "reading and writing" be well informed on this because it is among us the word is not meaningless so, thank you much.

In the verses of cordel, the poet was able to present in a very friendly and understandable way, all the information he learned about letramento. The writers' capacity to take in what they hear, see and feel and express their own thoughts through this form of composition is impressive. Like the poet Guaipuan Vieira, we can find composers of the world who use different forms of meaning-making. As I have conceptualized letramento, I envision it opening doors to people by valuing their multiple ways of communicating and expressing themselves while taking into consideration the cultural context in which they are embedded.
This chapter started with an overview of the concept of literacy and the need to transform the singular notion of communication and representation into a more pluralistic notion of literacies that value the multiple forms of communicating and expressing one's ideas, feelings and thoughts in a given cultural context. Second, it presented letramento as a new area of studies currently in development in Brazil. Following that presentation I have presented one of the forms of letramento found in Northeast Brazil - the literatura de cordel. The structure given to this chapter moves from a global presentation of literacy to a local form of letramento, and sets the stage for understanding the context of letramento's emergence within the even more specific structure of Projeto (Con)texto.
CHAPTER III

GOING BACK HOME: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

My attempts to understand the complexity of a relational universe while studying in the United States, prompted me initially to seek comprehension of my own Brazilian culture through the lenses of classic writers of Brazilian literature. The work of Roberto DaMatta was my initiation to the relational society of Brazil. Following DaMatta's own roots, I searched for the understanding of Brazilian society not in sociological studies, but rather in books of Brazilian literature. Lima Barreto, cited in chapter 2, presented me with a remarkable ethnography of a fictitious country named "United States of Bruzundanga", but in reality was the author's representation of Brazil.

My readings of books of Brazilian literature encouraged me to create a pedagogy to foster dialogue back home using these types of books as stimuli for discussion. What the Spindlers have termed cultural dialogue (1990b) emerges as a preliminary outcome of this pedagogy. Applied to the specific Brazilian context of this study, cultural dialogue addresses the need for people to become readers and composers of their cultures and to learn in a relational framework.
The notion of culture

The notion of culture I use to frame my inquiry was developed by Stanford University professors George and Louise Spindler (1994), in which they interpret culture as a dynamic process present in, and influencing, our daily interactions. The Spindlers suggest a condition of being "in process, in everything we do, say, or think in or out of school" (p. 2). Because of the transactional nature of culture as conceived by the Spindlers, culture is viewed as shaped and reshaped by people involved in sharing ideas, perceptions, arguing viewpoints and questioning assumptions. These assumptions, perceptions and the like are regarded by the Spindlers as cultural phenomena. Together, and by using the tools already available to them, people engage in a process of "hammering the world" into shapes, as conveyed in the following quotation by educational anthropologists McDermott and Varenne (1995). As they argue, there is a tendency in our societies to try to fit all socially shared elements of one's culture (e.g., socially shared norms, codes of behavior, cultural values, assumptions and traditions) within a single container of coherence. They caution about the instinctive use of the term culture as a container of coherence, saying straightforwardly that the "container leaks" (p. 325). They explain:

The coherence of any culture is not given by members being the same, nor by members knowing the same things. Instead, the coherence of a culture is crafted from the partial and mutually dependent
knowledge of each person caught in the process and depends, in the long run, on the work they do together. Life in culture, Bakhtin (1984[1940]) reminds us, is polyphonic and multivocalic; it is made of the voices of many, each one brought to life and made significant by others, only sometimes by being the same, more often by being different, more dramatically by being contradictory. Culture is not so much a product of sharing as a product of hammering each other into shape with the well-structured tools already available. We need to think of culture as this very process of hammering a world. (McDermott & Varenne, 1995, p. 326)

What this notion of culture emphasizes is that there is not one way to be in a certain culture. Accordingly, I studied the meaning of "being literate" (ser letrado) in a Brazilian cultural (con)text instead of emphasizing the Brazilian culture as a whole. Much like what George and Louise Spindler found in their study, The American Cultural Dialogue and Its Transmission I find that what we have in common in Brazil is not one coherent culture, but rather "a way of talking to each other about our common interests and our differences" (1990a, p. 1).

The understanding of culture as a product of people hammering each other into shape with tools already available turns into an ethical and moral issue when we consider how some of these tools can be used or withheld to block people's educational and social navigation and achievement. In Paulo Freire's opinion it is the role of educators to provide the oppressed with the "critical tools to understand their world, the tools that they were denied by not giving them access to education, to literacy, so they can read better the word as
well as the world" (in Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 388). The selection of which tools to make available to the students reflects the role of schools as a "calculated intervention in learning" (Spindler & Spindler, 1987c), selecting which tools or which cultural content will be taught by the teachers and which will not be taught. In order to help teachers and students to understand the factors that work against and also to empower them to overcome the obstacles they will encounter, George and Louise Spindler developed what they call a process of "cultural therapy" (Spindler and Spindler, 1989, 1994).

**Cultural Therapy**

The process envisioned by the Spindlers to raise cultural awareness bears similarities to Paulo Freire's (1970) approach to promoting conscientização. Like Paulo Freire, George and Louise Spindler believe that in order to be human and free one must first understand her/his ethnic culture and personal historical conditions. This understanding emerges through the process of what Freire called conscientização. As beings in-and-with the world, human beings and the world are in very close transaction with each other, just like a hand holding another hand. The understanding of this transaction person-world is what happens in the process of conscientização - it allows the development of critical awareness of the person in relation to her world. This critical awareness leads to liberation from a dominant culture, achieved as an outcome of the
process of conscientização by means of what Freire (1970) named praxis, i.e., "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 36).

While Paulo Freire's approach focuses on raising the consciousness of the oppressed people, the process of cultural therapy created by George and Louise Spindler has been applied to those in positions of power (e.g., teachers) relative to their interactions with individuals from ethnic minorities or other historically disadvantaged groups. Therefore, cultural therapy becomes complementary to the process of conscientização, as Marcelo Suárez-Orozco (1992) states, "in some respects, the other side of the coin in Freire's plea to 'raise the consciousness' of the oppressed" (pp. 50-51). George and Louise Spindler (1989) also acknowledge the similarities of the two processes which aim at raising the conscientização of people involved: "this process involves a kind of consciousness raising similar to Paulo Freire's 'conscientizacizan'" (p. 41).

George and Louise Spindler (1994) present, as a preliminary orientation, their definition of cultural therapy:

Cultural therapy is a process of bringing one's own culture, in its manifold forms-assumptions, goals, values, beliefs, and communicative modes-to a level of awareness that permits one to perceive it as a potential bias in social interaction and in the acquisition or transmission of skills and knowledge-what we later refer to as "instrumental competencies." At the same time, one's own culture, brought to this level of awareness, is perceived in relation to the "other" culture, so that potential conflicts, misunderstandings, and "blind spots" in
the perception and interpretation of behavior may be anticipated. One's culture as well as the "other's" culture become a "third presence," removed somewhat from the person, so that one's actions can be taken as "caused" by one's culture and the interaction with the "other" and not by one's personality. (pp. 4-5)

The process of cultural therapy has been applied in educational settings, for example, to explore the role of culture and social background in shaping opportunities for success in the classroom (Schram, 1994, 1998), to study school culture as an essential dimension that could block or promote change (Finnan, 1994), to study educational processes in day-care centers in Japan and the U.S.A. (Fujita & Sano, 1988), and as a process of healing applied in the school, community and the home (Trueba, 1993). Within this latter, broader context,

Cultural therapy provides us with a holistic understanding of why people do whatever they do, and how they interpret behavior in dealing with each other within and across groups. The basic claim of cultural therapy is that it raises our awareness of our own cultural values and our tolerance for the life-styles of others. (Trueba, 1993, p. 155)

Cultural therapy as conceptualized by George and Louise Spindler has psychological concomitants, but they are not the focus of the process. Instead, the focus is the "culture of the person and the way it biases relationships with children in classrooms" (Spindler & Spindler, 1994, p. 4). One of their classic examples of cultural therapy is the case of Roger Harker, a fifth-grade teacher (see Spindler & Spindler,
Culturally speaking, what emerged as significant in the Spindler's study was how Harker's middle-upper-middle class, white, Protestant background had a major impact on his performance as a teacher. Cultural therapy, in the case of Roger Harker, helped him to become aware of the assumptions that he brought to the classroom that had an immediate effect in his behavior and his interaction with students.

As a certified psychotherapist in Brazil, I have experienced moments when client and psychotherapist seem to walk in circles, returning to the same point over and over, almost like being trapped by something 'invisible.' This something 'invisible' might be cultural influences upon the person. It is in these moments, removed somewhat from the person, that one may find the "causes" or "influences" in the culture. Psychotherapy and cultural therapy are very delicate words to be used and may cause a big turmoil, due especially to the connotations of the word "therapy." George and Louise Spindler (1994) are aware of the delicate process they have created and they say, "What we are doing may not always be explicitly labeled 'cultural therapy,' however. There are dangers in this label. People object to receiving therapy when they don't think they are ill. And the most ill are often those who object the most vigorously" (p. 324).

For the Spindlers, the question of when cultural therapy ends and psychotherapy begins is relatively clear, as they state, "when personal problems dominate cultural problems"
The distinction between the personal and the cultural can at times be difficult to discern. As conceptualized by French philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1968), the space that separates the person and the culture is like the air that separates one hand holding the other; it is very hard to see which hand is touching the other hand. The interaction of the person and the world is what Merleau-Ponty has called the 'intermundane' (l'intermonde) person, very similar to Freire's (1970) notion of the person in-and-with the world.

**Methods of Inquiry**

**Interpretivist Research**

Corrine Glesne and Alan Peshkin (1992) have written, "The research methods we choose say something about our views on what qualifies as valuable knowledge and our perspective on the nature of reality" (p. 5). For this study I have elected to frame my inquiry within a qualitative approach. I use an interpretivist framework as a means to emphasize a holistic perspective and to "clarify what and how meanings are embodied in the language and actions of social actors" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118). This holistic and constructivist view, in contrast to a more linear view of the world, reflects my way of thinking and my way of seeing education as an interdependent dimension of culture. George and Louise Spindler (1987c) explain this interdependence, "We see education as cultural transmission, and of course cultural transmission requires cultural learning, so learning and
transmission are separated only by convention" (p. 3). My study encompasses the relationship of the reader, the word and the world as interdependent elements.

To understand and do justice to the complexity of the relationship among readers, words and worlds, I immersed myself in settings and lives of people who helped me to interpret this complexity in a Brazilian cultural context. My immersion in a Brazilian "cultural scene" (Spradley and McCurdy, 1988), facilitated my ability to identify and interpret culturally significant events and at least point the way toward a theory of cultural behavior (Frake, 1964). This approach to conducting qualitative inquiry gives my research an ethnographic orientation. Trueba (1992) and other researchers trained by George and Louise Spindler view ethnographic research as

an intensive learning experience whereby they immerse themselves in the processes of culture acquisition and transmission in specific contexts. Learning about life, human behavior, and motivational forces to act gives the ethnographer the proper perspective to make inferences about observed behavior and to interpret the meaning of behavior in less ethnocentric terms. (pp. 90-91)

Harry Wolcott (1987), a researcher trained by George and Louise Spindler, argues that ethnography does not simply entail the observation and recording of behavior. Rather, the ethnographer must place as central to her or his inquiry the interpretation of behavior inferred from a cultural viewpoint: "The purpose of ethnographic research is to
describe and interpret cultural behavior" (pp. 42-43). According to Wolcott, ethnographers make the implicit explicit (or the familiar strange). Ethnographers describe "what everybody already knows" (Wolcott, op. cit., p. 42), but, in contrast to the lay observer, the ethnographer "attempts to make explicit and to portray in terms of social interaction among many individuals... what its various members [of a group] know only tacitly and understand individually" (Wolcott, op. cit., p. 41).

Several modes of data gathering were used for me to experience the culture, enquire into the lives of study participants and examine other sources of information already available (Wolcott, 1992, 1994). The original techniques I considered using to gather the data for my research during its proposal stages are described below. In Chapters 4, 5 and 6 I will present the critical turning points of my actual fieldwork which prompted me to modify my original plan.

Collecting and Recording Data

I originally planned to collect most cultural data through four main techniques: (1) Cross-Cultural Comparative Reflective Interview (CCCRI), (2) participant observation, (3) ethnographic interviews, and (4) examination of written materials and other types of data prepared by other people (e.g., newspaper articles, curricula, etc.).
Cross-Cultural Comparative Reflective Interview (CCCRI)

Originally developed by professors George and Louise Spindler (1987a, 1987b, 1992, 1994) at Stanford University, the CCCRI method is designed to stimulate dialogue about pivotal concerns on the part of natives in comparable cultural systems. Some form of audiovisual material representing two cultures is used to "bracket" interviews with participants in each setting. The interview is conducted as "an inquiry into the perceptions, by the native, of his or her own situation and that of the "other," and the assumptions revealed in reflections about those perceptions [cultural phenomena]" (Spindler & Spindler, 1994, p. 6). One of the basic procedures used by George and Louise Spindler and other researchers (e.g., Spindler & Spindler, 1987a,b, 1992; Fujita & Sano, 1988) is to take films from two different cultures and show these films to their interviewees in the "other" country, eliciting reflective discussion of their own contexts and the situations of the other.

In this study, participants would read Brazilian books to serve as stimuli for discussion, eliciting cross-culturally reflective dialogue "bracketed" by the reactions to the books. They would be encouraged to compose responses in reaction to what they read, choosing from their preferred forms of construing and expressing meaning (literacies)-art, improvisation, movement, music, sound, and writing.

In addition to the discussion generated by all participants from Projeto (Con)texto, four randomly selected...
study participants would be interviewed individually every other week throughout the 9 months of this study. These four participants would watch the videotape with the discussion of the whole group from the previous week, and they would first be asked to reflect on their own participation and responses on that day. Then he/she would be asked to compare his/her viewpoint to the other participants' recalled on videotape. This type of interviewing represents a modified use of Cross-Cultural Comparative Reflective Interviewing (CCCRI) in that it would be applied within the same society, but with participants representing different subcultures (i.e., private and public educational backgrounds, "persons" and "individuals," etc.). This analysis would help me to make explicit the cultural assumptions and conceptual frameworks that underline Brazilian culture(s) and educational system(s). I would look at the participants' interpretations of their discussions as ways to infer interpretations of their cultural behaviors, and especially, as a way to seek clues to understand what it means to be literate in a relational Brazilian universe. Books of Brazilian literature would serve as important conduits of Brazilian culture(s) for the participants.

Apart from serving as a source of data for my inquiry, it was hoped that the group Projeto (Con)texto would help participants to learn to read a written text and also become readers of a "cultural text." By "reading a cultural text" I refer to a process akin to Freire's notion of "reading the
world," a process of extending meanings derived from the written word to the broader social and cultural context. The written word in itself can be restrictive. In reading a cultural text it is important that participants learn to "textualize" their meanings" (Clifford, 1986, pp. 117-118). By engaging in dialogues, participants would be able to join people from different backgrounds (e.g., curriculum developers and teachers educated in private and public schools, with or without college degrees, from prestigious or non-prestigious families) and identify pivotal issues that either distinguish or unite them in their efforts to perceive themselves as literate beings, helping them, in turn, to understand their role in relation to other people's development as literate beings.

The group Projeto (Con)texto would provide me with the emic (i.e., insider) views of Brazilian culture—"What is going on in terms of the ways various insiders see it?" My observations would provide me with the etic (i.e., outsider) views—"What is going on in terms of behavior as I, the presumably more detached and objective outsider, see it?" (Wolcott, 1988, p. 23). As someone educated in private and military schools who comes from a middle-upper social class, white, and Catholic background, my inquiry into the public educational system of education which serves the lower classes in Brazil situates me, socially and culturally, as an outsider observer.
(2) Participant Observation

In addition to gathering data with the participants of the group Projeto (Con)texto through discussions and CCCRI Interviews, more data would be collected through participant observation in several public elementary schools in the city of Fortaleza.

Participant observation is one of the important activities a researcher conducts in fieldwork. It "remains as the residual fieldwork category that includes anything that is not some kind of interviewing" (Wolcott, 1995, p. 102). However, as Wolcott (op. cit.) advises:

The key to participant observation as a fieldwork strategy is to take seriously the challenge it poses to participate more, and to play the role of the aloof observer less. Do not think of yourself as someone who needs to wear a white lab coat and carry a clipboard to learn about how humans go about their everyday lives. If you find you are comfortable only by remaining distant and aloof, why do you insist on describing yourself as a participant observer? (p. 100)

I would follow Wolcott's (op. cit.) advice to seek information by "getting nosy" (p. 102) and by participating in a broad range of activities, including work and life activities of the participants. I would regularly attend classes and participate in discussions, in classrooms and work settings of two selected participants from the group Projeto (Con)texto.

Participant observation would help me to understand the research settings more globally, along with the actions of
participants in and out of schools, and their behaviors in different natural settings, keeping in mind my broader research question of what it means to be literate (ser letrado) in a relational universe. As an active participant, I would lessen my role as a student of people to become a learner from people. "As a learner," writes Glesne and Peshkin (1992), "you are not in the research setting to preach or evaluate, not to compete for prestige or status. Your focus is on others, and you work to stay out of the limelight" (p. 42). In my effort to understand the complex relationships of my study settings, participants and behaviors, I would have to "make the obvious obvious," as Wolcott (1987) has suggested, or as other researchers have said, to make the familiar strange and then familiar again, so that observations recorded in fieldnotes could be translated into familiar meanings.

(3) Ethnographic Interviews

Ethnographic interviews are defined as "a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants" (Spradley, 1979, p. 58). Informal and formal interviews would be conducted with study participants, as well as with members from the larger educational and social community.

Informal interview refers to an unstructured conversation that accompanies participant observation. Such
conversations may take place spontaneously, for example, whenever clarification of a particular event or situation needs to be obtained (Agar, 1980). Wolcott (1995) emphasizes the importance of this casual interviewing approach and states that, "fieldworkers who ask no questions are sorely tempted to become their own informants" (p. 105). Wolcott (op. cit.) considers casual interviewing to include any situation in which a fieldworker is in a position to, and does, attempt to obtain information on a specific topic through even so casual a comment or inducement as, "What you were telling me the other day was really interesting..." or "I didn't have a chance to ask you about this before, but can you tell me a bit more about..." (p. 106)

On the other hand, formal interview refers to a more structured, prearranged conversation with key informants. When appropriate, I would conduct formal interviews recording them in audio tapes. "Formal taped sessions" writes Wolcott (op. cit.), "can provide opportunity for a different kind of exchange, one in which the person being interviewed is clearly "in the know," and the researcher the person who wants to find out" (p. 113).

The formal and informal interviews that I would conduct with participants would provide a context for my observations, fill in sketchy information obtained elsewhere, and might well prompt new and different questions. I would explore how participants incorporate notions of literacy into their perceptions of themselves and others, through which
forms of literacy they express their ideas and, therefore, how they perceive the role of literacy in their cultural context.

(4) Other Types of Data

I would collect written material pertaining to meetings and other activities within the educational system and in the schools. I would request that participants collect extra copies of all written material they received (e.g., memos, bulletins, campaign posters, letters, notes and advertisements).

I would obtain pertinent documents such as written school philosophies, curriculum proposal, and policy statements. I would also subscribe to two local newspapers and one major weekly magazine to collect information published about education in the city of Fortaleza, and Brazil at large. In addition, I would record on video tapes, televisions programs of interviews with local and national authorities in the field of education and culture; and in audio cassettes, interviews from radio programs and political speeches. Whenever possible, I would videotape and take photographs to capture the vitality of activities in unobstructive situations.

Note on the Interactive/Noninteractive Nature of Fieldwork

In some situations I would need to be an aloof observer, more like a "fly on the wall," rather than a participant observer. During these moments I would be a peripheral
learner, the one who learns by being in situations that foster learning, but not necessarily require action. This position might offer chances for me to reflect on what I would be observing and generate more questions for when I would be in active participation with my study participants. Interactive and noninteractive participation would reveal the essence of my fieldwork. Fieldwork here is understood as:

a form of inquiry in which one is immersed personally in the ongoing social activities of some individual or group for the purposes of research. Fieldwork is characterized by personal involvement to achieve some level of understanding that will be shared with others. (Wolcott, 1995, p. 66)

It was my hope that the use of multiple tools of data gathering in fieldwork would allow me to read the word and the world of public education in the city of Fortaleza in Northeast Brazil. CCCRI, participant observation and ethnographic interview would be the main tools I would use to shape an accurate description of what it means to be literate (ser letrado) in a Brazilian relational universe, while "hammering the world" together with my study participants in their natural settings.

However, as detailed in the following chapter, the critical points of my actual experience with fieldwork led me to modify what I had originally planned.

**Participants and Settings**

Located in the Northeast of Brazil, the state of Ceará, with approximately 6 million people (out of the 45 million
The population of the nine states that constitutes the region is one of the fastest-growing states in the country. Fortaleza, the capital of the state, is the fifth largest city in Brazil with a population of about 2 million people.

In Ceará, forty-three percent of the population lives with one minimum wage per month per family unit (approximately US$ 100.00/month for 40 hours of work per week). Seventy-five percent of the population lives in poverty with precarious housing, sanitary, educational and health services. Five percent of the population is extremely wealthy. The other twenty percent either have governmental jobs or own small businesses with an income not bigger than US$ 600.00 per month.

Public school teachers (and the majority of private school teachers as well) in Brazil and in Ceará belong to the lower salaries group. A teacher salary averages US$ 80.00 per month for 20 hours of work per week. In that country there are about 19 million illiterate people. From the students who start first grade, only fifty percent reach 9th grade. The rate of school retention in Brazil is thirty-three percent for grades 1-8 and thirty-two percent for high school. Within this reality, more than 8 in each 100 Brazilian teachers have not even finished middle school. In the majority of schools, the only resources available for teaching are the teachers' voices and classroom blackboards.

The state of Ceará is one of three states in the country (the other two being Minas Gerais and Rio Grande do Sul...
located in the Southeast and South regions of Brazil, respectively) where the level of illiteracy has dropped significantly over the last five years (from 39.5% to 28.5% between ages 11-14). The Ceará Ministry of Education is responsible for approximately 719 schools. The Fortaleza Ministry of Education serves approximately 185 thousand students in 137 schools.

Access to universities is still a privilege of the few. The majority of students who succeed in passing the Vestibular (the university entrance exam, a different one for each university in the country) come from private schools. Their preferences are the public universities which are better in quality and free. At the Universidade de São Paulo (USP) the most prestigious Brazilian university, seventy percent of its students came from private schools. The chances of a smooth school navigation from first grade to higher education for the students from public schools in Ceará (and in Brazil in general) are very limited.

The participants with whom I worked in this study reflected the educational and regional contrasts of Northeast Brazil, in particular the state of Ceará. Some of the participants had attended private schools and private colleges. The majority had attended public schools. Most of them had high school degrees with teaching certificate (magistério), and few had college degrees. Participants represented a range of lower to upper classes, bringing a mixture of races and religions.
Data Analysis

My primary reference point for analysis focused on the identification of significant cultural events among the ideas, perceptions, and assumptions of my study participants as literate beings (seres letrados) in a relational universe. By "significant cultural event," I refer to those insights that heightened participants' awareness of how their cultural behavior biased their social interaction with people representing other subcultures (e.g., rich and poor, schooled and non-schooled, private and public, teacher and student) and permitted them to perceive the roots of potential conflicts and misunderstandings in their cultural contexts.

The basic premises that oriented my study emerged out of my exploration of the social, cultural, and historical contexts discussed in chapters 2 and 3 and preliminary sections of this chapter. The basic premises from which I will be developing my analytical framework can be summarized as follows:

(1) The Brazilian Relational Universe. People's efforts to identify themselves as literate beings need to be viewed in the framework of a Brazilian social context in which webs of personal relationships and distinct categories of the person and the individual exert a strong influence upon people's educational opportunities and experiences.
(2) The Notion of Literacies. Literacy is often understood as the ability to express meaning through written language. I conceptualize literacies in broader terms, as the ability to construe and convey meaning at a certain cultural context through multiple forms of communication and expression, including art, improvisation, movement, music, sound, and writing. Letramento is a Brazilian conceptualization for literacy and the multiple and more encompassing forms of representation found among people in local social settings.

(3) The Concept of Culture. Culture is here conceptualized as a dynamic process that is present in the daily lives of people who, as members of a society or group, engage in interactions with others to share ideas and perceptions, argue viewpoints, and question assumptions. Culture, in this sense, becomes an influential force that (a) encompasses values, perceptions and viewpoints shared and transmitted in a given social group and (b) motivates individuals to pursue specific goals related to those values and viewpoints.

These basic premises provide the framework within which I was to make decisions regarding the analyses of data: pointing me to what is important to the context I am studying, helping me in deciding what is relevant and what is not.

As I experienced fieldwork in Brazil, my ideas were shaped and re-shaped in part due to my immersion with my
research participants in the local setting and in part due to the ways in which my participation prompted new insights into the relationships among the basic premises.
PART TWO

BECOMING LITERATE, BECOMING SOMEBODY

72
Fortaleza, 17 July 1997

Dear Junior,

I am riding the bus and suddenly I feel the need to write. I am remembering our first encounter at Projeto (Con)texto. It was full of emotion. I felt like a child that goes to school for the first time, full of expectations. I remember that each one of us had to take something that was representative of the person we are. I chose a song. From that day on I was never the same person again. I thank Projeto (Con)texto for helping me to think differently. And every new day I learn a little more for my emotional and professional lives. Everything I learn I try to implement in my classroom. By doing this, I am encouraging my students to become critical students, opening up their eyes to the world. I am helping them to see that Brazil is not only that small world they live in - a world of difficulties and misery. We need to fight and believe in a better Brazil. I also thank the books I had the opportunity to read, and to share my readings with each one of my brothers at Projeto (Con)texto. This is how I feel in (Con)texto - as a family - where we live moments of emotion, we laugh, cry, learn and respect one another. All this has helped me to grow more and more.
My favorite moment is when we share our books. Even though I don't speak much, I pay close attention to what each one says. It is impressive how one opinion is complementary to another. I also like our "Café Letrado" (Coffee with Letters). It is a very rich moment for me, when we all have the opportunity to know about the daily news. And we always have something new to share.

I truly hope that throughout the semester I will lose the fear of speaking. Even though we are all friends, I am still concerned if I am going to say something right or wrong.

Hugs,

Ákila

Public School Teacher

Fortaleza, Brazil
CHAPTER IV

FINDING VOICE, FINDING VALUE: BECOMING LEARNERS IN FRONT OF OTHERS

Of the 11 participants who volunteered to join Projeto (Con)texto I had met only 3 before, and these were invited directly by me to join this research group. The other 8 joined the project after hearing from a colleague who knew my work. We had worked together for several years in partnership projects with the Ministry of Education where she works. Word of Projeto (Con)texto spread quickly.

In my original plan I had proposed a maximum group of 8 participants. I was forced to expand the original number due to many participants who became interested in the project. I accepted 11 and still had to decline several more.

In September, Projeto (Con)texto was formed by a mixed group of people from the public educational system, including 1 student, 3 teachers, 1 librarian, 1 school supervisor, 1 adult educator, 1 special educator, 3 curriculum developers, people in classrooms and administrative positions. The only criteria for the formation of the group was the mixture of personal and professional experiences of the participants, which reflected the educational and social contrasts of Northeast Brazil. The group met throughout a nine-month
period, every other Saturday, for a whole morning, for a total of 60 hours. Although the meetings were designed originally for one semester, 7 participants decided to continue for another term, meeting for a total of 9 months. This study presents the outcomes of Projeto (Con)texto throughout all 9 months.

In Preparation for Encounter 1: Reaching the Group by Mail

Before meeting the group for the first time I wrote them a letter, a methodology I used in every session. All participants received at least one letter from me fortnightly. Writing and receiving letters was an important experience learned in classes taught by Dr. Jane Hansen during my Ph.D. program at the University of New Hampshire.

On September 6, I wrote (in Portuguese):

Dear participants of Projeto (Con)texto,
Welcome to [the place where we met]. Our first encounter will be on Saturday, September 21, from 8 am to noon. Using a workshop format we will experience the process of reading and writing.

For our first encounter I would like to ask you to please bring two objects, images or sounds which represent the person you are. In other words, select something and then reflect upon the reason for your choice. Bring them on the 21st. If in writing, your reflection could be a paragraph or a page long. If by any means of the arts, please bring what your imagination will create.

Our next encounters will happen on Saturdays, October 5 and 19, November 16 and 23 and December 7 from 8 am to noon.

Once more I would like to emphasize the workshop format of our encounters. Through the process of reading and writing you will let your potential emerge as a reader of the text and composer of the context. I am certain you will accept this challenge! All you need to do is to bring your whole self and your creativity. The rest we will experience together.
The [place where we met] is located at [address and phone number].
I'll see you in our first encounter.

**Encounter 1: The Person I am**

On September 21 the participants of Projeto (Con)texto woke up early on a free day to join the first Saturday encounter. I am here using the word encounter to represent the moments where the participants of Projeto (Con)texto met to learn in relationships with each other.

I woke up pretty early that first Saturday. I wanted to make sure I arrived at the school where we met before everybody else. I organized the chairs and tables in a circle outdoors. I placed the video camera and microphone in an unobtrusive place. The place and I were ready to welcome the participants.

Little by little everybody arrived and chose a place to sit. There was silence and apprehension among the group. Only those who know each other talked among themselves.

I introduced myself first. I shared with the group one of my favorites pictures. It was taken when I was about 6 years old. I was at my elementary school playground playing barefoot with my friends. I enjoyed the freedom to play and recalled the freedom to learn of those days. It was a place of experiential learning I would like Projeto (Con)texto to be. I told the group I am this person who takes pleasure in the freedom to be and the freedom to learn. The photograph represented the person I am.
"What represents you as a person?" I introduced the question to the group. With a key in her hand, Dora, a school supervisor, invited us to go to a classroom. She stood outside waiting for everyone to enter the room. When we were all in, she closed and locked the door and carried the key with her. Maria, an adult educator, reached the door handle and realized we were all locked up. Dora was the only one who had the key to free us. Even the room windows had bars. There was no way to escape. A few minutes later, Dora opened the door and invited us to reflect upon the experience back in circle. She presented herself as the key that opens doors. She allows doors to be open to other people to grow. "I wish I could live in a country that did not need keys" she concluded her presentation.

The music was soft and calming. It sounded like drops of water over crystal glasses. We all listened to "Main theme from 'Missing'" from a compact disc of Vangelis that Gaia, a curriculum developer, played as the representation of her person. She explained the meaning the music had for her by reading a written reflection:

I chose this song because it is for me like an angel that plays a bell and magically takes me to a cathedral to listen to an angelic chorus in the capitol, playing different instruments and resonating a calming and soft hymn. Because it allows me to feel the pleasure of listening to the chords that are like drops of water over crystal. It touches my heart that expands like rhythmic waves throughout my whole body and beyond it creating in me a soft and light movement, making me feel like dancing a full and genuine dance, even though I am still. A dance that comes from inside, from inside of me, an inside that I don't even know. It
flourishes like a key of passage that opens each space in my heart. [...] It makes me feel light. I fluctuate even though I am still [...].

Standing up from her chair, Fernanda, a curriculum developer, cleared her throat and said she felt frustrated by not being able to be who she wanted to be [a performer]. She performed a poem with a text that revealed the power of the regional language of Northeast Brazil. Her body language and tone of voice kept everyone's attention. At the end we all gave her an ovation.

"To be or not to be?", the classic Shakespearean question inspired Marcia, a curriculum developer, to create a list of questions of herself: "To or not to be... sincere, authentic, true, daring, loving, intellectual," and the list went on.

A pen represented the person Maria is. It is her work instrument which leaves marks on paper that were simply ideas or dreams before. But also a song represented the person she is. The song said something like: "my child's heart never loses the hope to become what it has always dreamed to be... it is not only the shade of a happy woman." She enchanted all of us with her voice when she sang to us.

A book without words was what represented Esperança, a public school teacher. Instead of words each page of a book she made had a different color. The black page represented the darkness that her life once was. The red page represented the blood of Jesus that saved all of us. The yellow page
represented the city of gold where there was no sadness or darkness. The white page represented her clean life after being forgiven by God. She had been reborn spiritually. And the green page represented hope and growth. "Every day is a new day," she concluded.

"It was not easy to find something that represents me" Lia, a librarian, said. In searching for an inspiration or idea, she had decided to open the Bible randomly and reached the "parable of talents." She presented her reflection from what she read in the Bible:

The symbol chosen by me was the peace crane. It is the icon of purity and peace, it represents tranquillity, a friendly word and softness. It also means a protective hand, a good action and a fraternal heart. [...] I am a human being that travels through different paths, leaving in each path my moments of pain, doubts, anxiety, sadness for the losses and happiness for the victories, but mainly, moments of peace."

She concluded reading her written reflection typed on a computer and illustrated with a colorful and large peace crane.

The music was also representative of Alice, a public school teacher. "I am learning to play the piano. There is one song that is my existential hymn" and she sang the song. When she feels sad Alice sings. Music helps her to move on. This song was the starting point for everything in her life.

The scent of a perfume represented Bela, a special educator. The perfume involved smell and touch. For her, the touch was what represented her. She values kisses, hugs and
care. "I would die if I lost contact with other people," she said.

The first toy of Pingo, the only adolescent in the group, was what represented the person he is. Holding his bear, he read from his written reflection:

He is a small toy with much value to me, because in all moments of my life I lived with him, during my happy and sad moments. He represents the person I am because he carries all the love that destiny did not let my parents give to me in my childhood and today. ...I have kept this toy for 12 years. Time and I are his best friends. ...I had other toys but only this bear best represents my life – a lost childhood.

"Music means a lot to me" said Ákila, a public school teacher, the 11th participant of Projeto (Con)texto. She chose a song and also sang to the group. It said something like: "If you want to know why I changed, I can't answer because not even I know. I forget myself to remember you [...]." This song, she explained, evoked many memories in her. She went on to describe that she is just like the person in the song, she always remembers other people first before taking care of herself.

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Pingo, the only boy and the only adolescent in the group seemed to be relaxed in the group, asking questions and wanting to share. He told us he would like to read another of his compositions:

We Were Six

Fortaleza, 1975. This was a very important year for a young couple who met each other. They were Carlos, 19 years old who lived with his 8
brothers and she was Sofia, who lived with her parents and 5 brothers. They saw each other for 3 years before they decided to get married in 1978. The first son was born but died right after birth. They decided to adopt Marcos. After 3 years came the third son Pingo and finally the younger son Julio. One year later they separated. I think God wanted it like this. After the separation Marcos and Pingo went to live with their grandmother. Carlos [the father] started a new family. And also Sofia [the mother] who took Julio with her. This was the end of a family that ended with pain and agony.

He read a note he wrote on the page: "When the sun shines in the morning, I walk towards the future to build a family and never give up the dream I had in my childhood of having a loving family."

Dora asked Pingo what made him want to write. He said a teacher in 6th grade encouraged him to write. "He [the teacher] was not only a teacher. He was a friend, too. He helped us to pursue our goals."

Based on his comments Alice shared her discomfort with the prejudice there is against the public schools in Brazil: She said, "There is a need to change the prejudice against the public school. People say that it is not of good quality, that public school is only for the children of the poor. It might not be in all schools, but in the school where I teach I know teachers who are committed to rescuing the quality of teaching. Moral values are what is missing. Our family is losing these moral values. We must rescue these things with our students, so that they get to know these values. Our students at the public school have as much value as any other student."
In day 1 the issue of finding value in the students and teachers who make the public education system was voiced.

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Also in day 1 I invited the participants to explore the possibilities in reading one text. I introduced the notion of "organic reaction" by asking them to reflect upon the story I would read. I chose The Rainbow Fish (North-South Books, 1992) to read to them. I invited the participants to respond to the story. When I finished reading the book I asked: What does this story make you feel? Does it remind you of anyone you know or any experience you have had? Does it call to mind thoughts, ideas, concerns or attitudes? What does your body say?

With paper and pencils in hand there was total silence in the group while all wrote down their reflections on the just finished experience. A few participants were ready to share. Gaia started:

I need to find the generous fish inside of my immense ocean. The little master fish that has already learned the lesson of sharing, who pays the price for the company of friends with his own shining scales. A wise fish who learned in the pain of loneliness that friendship is part of the happiness of living, that the unaccompanied and isolated beauty cannot bring any happiness.

It is better to share a treasure than lose a friend. They are the ones who enlighten our existence. In truth, there is no money that will pay the right friends at the right moment.

In the Bible, the sacred book, a friend is worth more than a treasure. That who found a friend, found a treasure.

I also know this. But... to which point am I donating myself, offering my talents for those who surround me?
Come, Rainbow Fish! Teach me the lesson to
color life with the light of loving attitudes, more
beautiful than any glitter. Bring from inside of me
caring gestures for my equals, my friends, my
brothers.

Ákila was also eager to share what she wrote:

The story of The Rainbow Fish is very pretty
and moving. It makes us reflect upon the selfishness
of human beings, that so often become so attached to
material goods that are even able to step over other
people. They forget those in need of so little.

And those who do not know how to share what
they have live in despair and loneliness. If those
people who have so much started to share a little of
what they have with other people, they would for
sure feel better and maybe, there would not be so
much social injustice.

This story made me do a self-analysis of
myself as a person. Am I acting like The Rainbow
Fish?

After each sharing, participants responded with comments
to what they heard, with just a brief pause before another
person was ready to share. Esperança read:

The story of The Rainbow Fish reminds me of
the history of the human being.
There are people like this too, who do not
give up their own interests, their own conditions
and positions to share with the other. And there are
those who like to share, but only what is left over,
what is useless, something that would be thrown
away.

The pretty fish had to go through moments of
loneliness to feel how hard it is to live away from
friends.

After a few more sharing and reactions Encounter 1 came
to a closing. I handed to each one of the participants a copy
of A Importância do Ato de Ler (The importance of the act of
reading) by Paulo Freire. This was the first book the group
will read together. In response to the experience of reading the book I asked the participants to represent their own processes of learning to read and write using any means of representation. The group will meet again in two weeks.

Encounter 2: Learning to Read and Write

Participants seemed excited. Every one had something to say in response to Freire's book. Gaia started by sharing a big spiral she drew on a construction paper with the names of authors who influenced her process of literacies construction. Among all, she emphasized the importance of the Russian writer Makarenko and his Poema Pedagógico (Pedagogical poem). At home, Gaia was encouraged to read by her mother, who is an avid reader. Gaia reads in French, English and Portuguese. She was educated in privileged private schools.

On the other hand, for Akila learning to read and write was not a pleasant experience. She was educated in the rural area of the state and physical punishment was still used in her schooling days. In her school there were no books and only a few magazines to be used in class. She remembered that it was in a magazine that she learned how babies are born. She was afraid that someone might have discovered that she had learned the truth on that day. It had been almost 10 years since she had read a book before reading Freire's book in Projeto (Con)texto.

Bela had a hard time recalling her experiences in learning to read and write. She had also been educated in the
rural area. She couldn't remember how she was introduced to reading and writing.

Magazines her father bought were also important in the process of learning to read and write for Maria. She had always loved to read. She reads every day, but not always for pleasure. Professional books consume most of her reading time.

Alice tried to find her penmanship book, but did not succeed. This was the most vivid memory she had of learning to read and write – the dotted letters and small words printed on the penmanship book, that made her eager to read them.

Playing with words was recalled with pleasure by Lia. She likes poetry and has always read this literature genre.

A book was the symbol that best represented Esperança's process of learning to read and write. She also had always liked to read. As an adolescent she used to collect the essays published in the newspapers. When she had a book in her hands she lost the notion of time and only released it when she fell asleep.

My own process of literacies development was represented through a song called "Errar é humano" (It's human to make mistakes) by Toquinho. Since I was the child of a clever mathematician, my teachers wanted me to be perfect in everything I did. Only A grades were expected from me. But I was not perfect and it was by making mistakes that I learned to do right.
Recalling memories from the personal processes of literacies development was stimulated by the reading of Freire's *A Importância do Ato de Ler*. In this little book, Paulo Freire shared his own experiences of learning to read and write under the mango trees in Northeast Brazil.

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It was time for a different coffee break. We called it "Café com Letras" (Coffee with Letters). Sitting around a table we all drank coffee, natural fruit juice and ate biscuit and cake, while we shared something we were reading or read recently - a book, a newspaper or magazine article, a lose poem, the lyrics of a song, a painting or anything else that prompted a participant to have the desire to share with others. This was the first "Coffee with Letters" that lasted for about 30 minutes and was repeated in the next encounters.

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The talk and sharing among the participants of *Projeto (Con)texto* was continuous. We returned to the outdoor area where our discussion took place and sat in chairs around a long table.

Reactions to Paulo Freire's book kept the discussion going at that moment. Lia found it important to learn about Freire's *alfabetização* (print literacy) process. His experience of learning in the world and writing with sticks on the sand was an important experience to recall.
In Gaia's opinion, the person who has the pleasure to read does not need much stimulation. Paulo Freire learned while "he was walking in the world."

The pleasure of reading is something a person is born with in the opinion of Esperança. She remembered when she was a child that she liked to read any kind of printed material she found.

For Alice, all that is harder to get turns into something more pleasurable, because there is the need to search for it. When things are already available you end up not valuing them much. Paulo Freire learned to value his experiences.

Reading books at home was a constant act while Gaia was growing up. Her father bought books for the family and her mother read constantly. As a mother, Gaia also buys books for her daughters. But one of her daughters doesn't want anything to do with books. Gaia thinks she has other talents and interests. Freire brought in Gaia the memories of the importance she and her family give to books.

While reading Freire's book Maria started to question her time to read for pleasure. Lately, she had read books for her work and they do not always become a pleasurable experience. She wanted to make time for non-work related types of literature.

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Before encounter 2 ended, I distributed a second book to each of the participants. We would spend the next two encounters with Os Bruzundangas of Lima Barreto. This text served as stimuli for more discussion in the forthcoming Saturdays.

Encounter 3: The Brazil in the Book is (Not) the Same

The book Os Bruzundangas, distributed in the previous encounter, stimulated a heated discussion among group members. As participants arrived, they each had a different reaction to the book. Os Bruzundangas is composed of independent essays published by Lima Barreto between 1923 and 1927. For some people the book is a mirror of the Brazil of the 1990s. For others, the reality in Brazil is no longer as it was presented by Lima Barreto.

Gaia hated the book. She claimed the book did not portray a true reality of Brazil, even in the 1920s. It would have never become a book if she were the editor. Maybe some essays would find a space in the newspaper.

On the other hand, Maria loved Os Bruzundangas and for her it is still a true picture of the current Brazil. Gaia couldn't resist saying to Maria that her Brazil has changed. But Maria continued to defend that most of the issues he raised are still true to these days. For example, in the 1920s, a job position was taken by people who were referred by friends, even though they had no qualifications for the tasks they were appointed to. Similar situations are still happening in the 1990s according to Maria. And she said she
felt shocked to realize that over the past 60 years little had changed regarding the nature of the work force.

Gaia had a hard time responding to Maria's defense of *Os Bruzundangas*. They talked about the determination of Brazilian people, based on a passage of the book where Lima Barreto said that people in this country did not seem to pursue deeply these issues that they love, they didn't fight for what they wanted. Gaia disagreed while Maria agreed with the author. In Gaia's opinion the problem lies in the Brazilian people's lack of voice. They are not respected by the people who are in leadership positions. Those who reach power positions tend to forget where they come from and no longer listen to the people's desires. According to Lima Barreto there were only two ways through which Brazilian people could express all their feelings with freedom: through the carnival and through *futebol* (soccer). Gaia continued her reflection by saying that through these channels of expression people truly reveal themselves. They reveal authentic feelings. Unfortunately what they say is not listened to carefully by the leaders.

Gaia's major dissatisfaction with the book was that Lima Barreto presented only the problems to the reader, and did not propose solutions. She thinks he assumes a comfortable position of criticizing and pointing out problems without presenting suggestions on how to solve them. She compared the work of Lima Barreto to the previous book by Paulo Freire we read in *Projeto (Con)texto*. While Lima Barreto presented
problems, Freire presented his criticism but also his contributions to solve the problems.

The life full of prejudice lived by Lima Barreto was highlighted by Alice who believes that the author wrote about the life he lived. He was a man of dreams, but his dreams did not find spaces in the society. Other people "killed" Lima Barreto's dreams. The society of today still does the same, Alice argued, allowing a small group of people to dictate the interests and status of everyone else.

Gaia became more reflective and said that the fact that we have reached a level of development and that the reality presented in the book is no longer true, is the proof that there has been some transformation. There is more need for political consciousness and participation in Brazil. The transformation of a society does not happen as a magic trick. It is a difficult process and she believes we are experiencing this process in Brazil. There is a new force and a new idealism among the Brazilian youth.

Alice again reminded us of the life lived by the author. He was mullato and poor. His writing was a way he found to criticize the society, especially the people in power. She believes he used the writing to convey his frustrations.

And the teacher has much power, reminded Gaia. "I don't know if we are aware of this."

"But we don't have the political consciousness that Paulo Freire refers to," said Alice. "Education is not disconnected from politics and we always tend to separate
these. Why? Because we only know a type of politics that is not democratic, that is not concerned with the interests of the common person. We only know a type of politics that is interested in fulfilling personal interests. Therefore, we cannot teach what we have never learned. When we start to experience in our context a type of politics that is good for all people, then I believe the school will be strong."

Gaia felt excited with Alice's statements. She said: "If the politicians are able to control people, we teachers also have the power in our hands. The new generation we are forming is interacting with people they respect, admire and listen to. We can share our values with our students not only through words, but through postures as well. We teachers need to be aware that we serve as references for our students. I truly believe in the potential teachers have... we can transform generations! Students can be our witnesses."

Alice believes in the power words carry, but they can only reach other people when there are doors open to let them propagate. She also questioned if the work teachers did with their students was enough or if there was also a need to do some work with the parents. She thinks it is important that parents continue the work initiated at the school.

Maria asked a question to the group: "Why didn't people value Lima Barreto's work?"

For Pingo the answer was easy: "Because he was poor. People tend to only value those who are important."
"Yes, I agree. There was much prejudice against him. Only those who had money were valued," said Maria.

Ákila who listened to the whole debate quietly said that her first reaction to the book was negative. She couldn't understand what the author wanted to say. But she continued to read and slowly the words started to gain some meaning.

Esperança who also had been quiet until that point, said, "Reading Lima Barreto was as hard as eating a bone." As a representation of her reaction to the book she drew a dog's bone on a piece of paper. All laughed with her as she shared this "organic" reaction to the book. She also reflected about the epoch when the author lived (late 1800s and early 1900s).

"He emphasized the negative aspects of our country. And because of the lack of freedom of speech he had, he decided to write with difficult words. For me, reading this book was almost like eating an indigestible food. Even though the book was not an easy reading, the messages the author wanted to convey proved to me he was a man of visions. Since he didn't agree with all the situations he lived in, he reflected upon what he saw through writing his reality." In her opinion, writing for Lima Barreto was a way of asking, "Am I the only one who is seeing this?" The reality is still hard in Brazil, according to Esperança. She said there are people who leave the country because they can't stand living in this reality.

"It is easy to see politicians working to benefit their own family. People who reach the power positions seem to become cold and distant from people. They can no longer see the
whole spectrum of human beings, but only those who are near them," concluded Esperança.

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In a little over two hours we had covered much territory. The discussion raised by Os Bruzdangas was so engaging that there was not even a break for the "Café com Letras" (Coffee with Letters). The agreements and disagreements generated by the book engaged the readers in an exciting discussion about the realities it presented, helping the participants of Projeto (Con)texto to apply the text to the context they were currently living in Brazil.

In the next encounter the same book would be used as stimuli for discussion. Some of the participants would finish the text, others decided they wanted to read some chapters again; and still others felt they had had enough of this book.

The discussion generated in this encounter led me to create a different activity for the group. I decided to "photograph" participants voices. For this first experience, I decided to transcribe the major parts of the dialogue between Gaia and Alice and print it out for the whole group to reflect upon the next time. I did not wait for the day of encounter 4 to hand it in. I mailed the activity to all participants and invited them to reflect upon the dialogue by writing their own reactions to the words they read.
Encounter 4: The Role and Power of Teachers

In response to my written request received before this encounter, three of the participants reacted to the dialogue between Gaia and Alice, where they spoke about the power teachers have.

Alice wrote:

My first reaction in reading the dialogue between Gaia and I was: Did I say all this? It is interesting how we, in an informal conversation are able to express opinions about controversial subjects.

I remembered the days when I would never have opened my mouth to say anything, especially about these issues. At that time, besides feeling afraid of making mistakes, of sharing my opinions, I also did not have a critical consciousness. The school had not awakened me to the critical reading of my context, a 'reading of the world' as Paulo Freire says. [...] One day, listening to a professor speak, she said 'the worst fear of expressing our thoughts is the frustration that we feel afterwards for not having said.' I reflected much upon what she said and realized that I really felt frustrated for not speaking up my own thoughts. Since then I have decided to fight against my fear of making mistakes. Nowadays, I am able to share my own opinions and thoughts without having the fear. This was the beginning of my political process. I have realized I am a person who belongs to a historical context and who is also able to interpret and transform this context.

Considering what I said before, I believe that the role of the teacher is to provide opportunities for her students to become readers of the world by articulating and motivating "storms of ideas," helping them to become critical citizens who are able to express their opinions without the fear of making mistakes. In order for this to happen, we teachers must create the opportunities in the school to share this process of political consciousness. We can not teach what we do not experience. Starting with her own consciousness of a reader of the world, the teacher will discover her role as a transformer in the formation of future generations, as Gaia said. She will feel committed to exercising her role as a teacher not only in the classroom, but in a
broader extension of the school, reaching out to the students and to the society.

We might think that this is a kind of utopia, a dream that will never happen. However, it is in dreams that everything starts to get a shape, and become reality.

For Pingo, in response to the dialogue between Alice and Gaia, the role of a teacher is very important for the life of new generations, because they teach us to live the reality and also teach us to live the day of tomorrow. But not all teachers have the same commitment. Many do not have the experience to share with their students. I know this, because in the interior where my grandmother lives, there are four teachers who have not finished middle school.

It is common for teachers to talk in class about our future. In some days the teachers spend most of the time talking about the future and when the class in finished my colleagues say that on that day the teacher did not teach, she only talked.

Gaia felt surprised when she read her words printed on a piece of paper. She responded:

When I read the dialogue I began to reflect upon the responsibility of the written word. I was surprised to see my speech "photographed". I remembered all I had said and now I read my own words. It was exactly what I believed and still believe. However, I feel the need to clarify more about the power teachers have over their students and what allow them to transform or form new mentalities. This is a true power. However, it doesn't mean that everything will be solved in this relationship of teacher-student. Outside the classroom, outside the school, the world continues its own dynamics. The change that happens is in relation to the attitudes of well trained students.

Let me explain it better: when the teacher in the classroom works consciously in aiming at the development of the critical, participatory and creative spirit of the students, she is developing a great potential in the training of new citizens. She
is 'opening minds, making minds'. While she develops this kind of work in preparation of new generations, the school, the district and the city continue with their peculiar characteristics. In other words, the competent work of the teacher in the classroom is not a magic trick nor it is a medicine for all the problems. The educational process is like a seed that has its own time of maturation. It needs to be watered frequently. It needs care and rich soil to grow, flourish and give fruit, all at its own time.

I say this not to create an illusion in the mind of the teacher. But, it is necessary that he believes in the importance of his work and in the transformation of a bigger society, and it all has its start in his classroom.

Teachers should not feel hopeless when they decide to pursue this career, even when all seems to be tough. Teachers should invest in their own creativity and never lose their hope. They should never give it up because in the world, some plant, others collect and yet others taste the fruits.
INTERTEXT

Fortaleza, 20 July 1997

Dear Junior,

How pleasant it is to acknowledge the good things that surround us. Throughout the nine months so many pleasant experiences happened at Projeto (Con)texto that is hard to say which one was best.

To be part of Projeto (Con)texto is a privilege for me, especially considering we live in a country so poor in instruction, education and information. Considering myself a privileged person, I try to benefit the most from everything that reaches me. I also find pleasure in sharing my knowledge with those that I encounter.

It was very enriching to have the contacts with people in a group full of so many diverse ideas. I always felt at ease in this group, a place where my imagination could flourish, in a space so rich with life, creativity and openness.

It was an impact for me at the beginning to see this group composed of so many different kinds of professionals and backgrounds. I immediately thought how hard it would be to manage so many differences - differences in age, professions, etc.

I learned that "the difference of each singing bird can form a beautiful symphony." These differences formed a chain
of ideas, experiences, fears of making mistakes, happinesses, dreams, love and hopes. All this allowed us to generate a work of educational and social transformations.

I experienced the pleasure of learning, having the reading as a fundamental tool for other types of learning. A book is our main tool to expand our memory and imagination.

I learned a lot... I am still learning, day after day...

"It is for sure that each one of us who form Projeto (Con)texto are an eternal learners."

Rejoice Projeto (Con)texto!
Rejoice and enjoy!
Rejoice to create,
Rejoice to love,
Rejoice to share,
Rejoice to transform,
our ideas into ACTIONS.

Hugs,
Lia
Librarian
Fortaleza, Brazil
CHAPTER V

DISCOVERING MULTIPLE FORMS OF TEXT AND REPRESENTATION

During Encounter 4, in which the role and power of teachers was discussed, a sculpture sat on the middle table calling people's attention to the reason for its placement: was it just a piece of decoration or was it part of a deliberate plan on my part? Placed over a round piece of wood, there were five human figures made out of natural clay. They shaped the body of a male person in five different positions: in the first, the body lays down flat on the ground with the face down on the floor; in the second the body is still flat on the ground, but the face of the man is a little raised from the floor as he wanted to turn it to the side; in the third position the knees bend slightly, his hands push the ground as he wants to lift his body from the floor; in the forth position his arms rest beside his body, his knees touch the floor and the body gets ready to stand up; in the fifth and last position, he stands up with open arms and his face looks up and his mouth is rounded as he is saying something; by the feet of the fifth body there is a round stone.

I gave plenty of time for the participants to explore the sculpture. They stood up, looked from different angles,
touched the clay and in their minds, they gave different meanings to what they saw and felt. I interrupted the silence by asking two questions to the participants:

1) What does this "text" (sculpture) make you feel?
2) What does it make you remember?

All participants looked attentively at the sculpture and wrote down their reactions. Before sharing what they wrote I invited them to reflect upon the sculpture as a text. "Why do I call it a text?", I asked.

Marcia said that you can read it as a text, "step by step. There is a cohesion in the five stages. Everything is detailed."

"Do you think that the artist who designed the sculpture had something in mind she wanted to convey?" I asked.

For Esperança, the artist did not have a reader in mind. But Marcia knew exactly who the artist wanted to read her sculpture.

"What I find important in this type of text" said Alice, "are the multiple texts it can reproduce. It allows us to construct different texts and different readings. It becomes very interesting. When you read a written text you find 3 or 4 opinions that match yours. This type of text creates the space for different readings and different constructions of texts that are different from the written text. All that you see has a special meaning."

Bela believed that people who work with clay have much sensitivity and they don't know what shape their work will
take until they finish it. It is when the work is done that they realize what they wanted to represent. The work with clay happens in the process.

"But I think that at least the idea of what she wanted to convey she already had in mind," said Marcia.

This sculpture reminded Bela of the film "The Dead Poet's Society". She remembered that people have many faces. Sometimes they can celebrate nature; sometimes they are sad or sometimes they might contemplate something without anything in mind.

For Alice the stone in the sculpture represented the beginning and the end. "Each human figure represents the evolution and growth of the person. I imagined that the sculpture would be our life cycle, with the ups and downs of life; the moments when you fall and the moments when you stand up."

"It also reminded me of the evolution of the human being," reflected Esperança. "A child is sleeping and later it comes to grow. She crawls before the first steps." The sculpture also reminded her of an alcoholic addict who is in total despair; drunk on the ground without any hope. He tries hard to stand up to rescue his own love and moral and spiritual values. There is a left over strength that helps him to stand up and at the end he celebrates his efforts with a cry of freedom.

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Except for Esperanças, the other readers of the sculpture preferred to share their reactions orally. Esperanças couldn’t keep her pen still. Tears dropped from her eyes. She volunteered to share what she had written:

When I look at these human figures the first image that comes to my mind are the stages of life. The baby when is born is always at the first position, laying down. Later, he grows and starts to crawl. He feels that it is hard to walk, but he keeps trying until the day he is able to walk. When he overcomes his fears, he finds balance on his feet, stands up and reaches the erect position. He opens his arms and says: I succeeded.

These images also remind me of a person who is addicted to alcohol, who is in despair. Even without strength, he keeps fighting against his weaknesses, still trying to stand up again. Little by little he stands up, fighting to rescue his own love, moral and spiritual values. Finally, as another force pulls him, he stands up and says 'Thanks God I am still alive and I will succeed because God did not make me to stay in this miserable condition.'

These silent images also remind me of a car accident. Someone who was thrown out of the window in a car crash who became unconscious for a long time. Later, when she gains consciousness again, she realizes she is alone in a foreign place. Feeling weak and without forces, she tries hard to stand up and asks for help. In her mind, she starts to recall the memories of the accident. She feels relieved because she was alone in the car. She takes a deep breath and realizes that her life is born again at that moment.

We all listened carefully to Esperanças while tears dropped from our eyes. There was silence...

Esperanças was hugged and congratulated for her moving story. Before we ended I distributed another book (the third) for each of the participants. During the next two encounters we will react to Contos by Machado de Assis. It was hard to leave the room. We were moved by Esperanças’s words.
The experience with the sculpture was very powerful for me. I was happy with the impact it had on the participants. More important yet, was their understanding of the plural notion of text. Their realization that a sculpture is a piece of text proved to me the influence Projeto (Con)texto was having in broadening the notion of literacies in the participants. I decided to invite the sculptor to attend the next encounter and share with the group her own process of composing her piece of art.

Encounter 5: Sculpture as Text

The emotions from the last encounter were still vivid in our minds. To make them even more so, Esperança started this encounter by sharing an edited version of what she had written in response to the reading of the sculpture in the previous encounter.

A man was tired of his life. All around him had no more meaning. The disillusion, the sadness, all contributed for him to distance from all and from everything.

It was during one of these moments of loneliness that he decided to walk without a destiny. Without realizing he reached a large park. He felt like sitting on a bench. All he wanted to do at that moment was to look around, trying to organize the thoughts in his mind. Suddenly his eyes catch a butterfly. She is ill and tries hard to fly. He thinks about the fragility of the butterfly, that even hurt still tries hard to fly. 'What about me, what have I done to survive? I wish I could also fly'. He stopped and listened to an inner voice that said: 'fly away; your thoughts are free and you can fly high'. He thought to himself: 'The butterflies are so colorful and beautiful!' He was interrupted by the voice that said: 'Color your imagination. See the multiple colors of nature. You can also be as beautiful as the butterflies.' The man began to smile. The butterfly was now flying away. He left the park feeling relaxed. He felt just like the
butterfly that was flying. He remembered the lesson learned from the butterfly to value his own life, the things he lost and the things he still has. In order to find love one needs to have a life. And to have a life, you need to love yourself.

Needless to say, this moment was also followed by a period of silence. Time was needed to reflect upon the beautiful message shared by Esperança.

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The reactions to the book *Contos* by Machado de Assis were presented next. "What did this book make you feel? What did it remind you of?" I asked.

Fernanda believes that any text has something that relates to our lives. What called her attention the most was the issue of the cards. "I learned to play cards, just by playing with others. But I also used them to predict the future of people. I didn't trust it, but other people did. [...] I used to joke and tell people that my cards predict a short future, if it happens, it will happen soon. A friend of mine who was 50 years old asked me to play the cards for her. I told her that the cards showed me there was a marriage for her soon. One day she called me and said she had got married. I told her my cards didn't fail."

Maria responded to Fernanda saying, "I believe all these are projections that we make. We have so many dreams that any word we hear becomes a motivation for living."

Gaia thought that the essay "O Pai contra mãe" (The father against the mother) was the most powerful for her. "As
soon as I finished reading it I wrote: 'I had never seen a father's love as strong as the mother's. We know what a mother can do for a son - even miracles.' When I wrote this I began to think about my father. I am sure my father would do the same for me. He would show his love with all energy. It is almost like an instinctive love. In order to protect a child, there is no price. Everything has a meaning. ...Not only in this essay, but in all essays written by Machado de Assis, he deals a lot with this issue of destiny. We tend to worry about it, but the right thing happens at the right time."

Dora shared her difficulty in reading. She finds it hard to concentrate. "But what called my attention was the issue of the mirror, especially the "adding" part. I spent a long time working as the principal of a public school. For the last two years I have been working as a school supervisor, but I don't like it. This role has not yet reached me. I spent such a long time as a principal that I can't see myself in another role. I realized I need his [the author] mirror to see me in the role of a supervisor, to rescue all the potential I have that I have not yet discovered."

For Maria, the "Medalhão" (Medallion) was the essay that called her attention better. "It is the typical way of thinking of Machado de Assis. He talks about the human condition. I don't know any other writer who conveys the human nature so well as him."
Alice found impressive the external soul the author talked about. What people normally think they are internally, they are not. "Then we wear a mask, because it is important that other people feel us the way we want them to see us. Many times we place this cover over us and erase what we really are. In the essay of the "Medalhão" (Medallion) I felt that the father did not want to turn the son into a dreamer, an idealist. He wanted his son to borrow other people's dreams in order to survive, to differentiate himself, to become important. This reminds me a lot of this elite society we find in Brazil. The father wanted the son to transform his inner soul so that he was accepted by the society as an important person."

The sentence, "Loneliness is the workshop of ideas," written by Machado de Assis, caught Pingo's attention. He agreed with it. "Sometimes I am at home and I start to have ideas. But sometimes I don't agree, because when I am here with you I also want to write. I received a medal and I want to thank this group for it. I won the contest of compositions thanks to this group. Because when I am here I have ideas."

"I find important," said Alice "that the person who wants to become a writer starts being demanding of himself. I like the words of Rachel de Queiroz when she says that we must feel the pleasure of reading our own text, but at the same time we question, will people like what I like? So we begin to be demanding and it is not only with writing, it also happens in any kind of creation."
The sculpture was again on the table. The sculptor was our guest in this encounter. She listened carefully to all participants. Dora, who was absent the last time, said that as soon as she saw the sculpture she remembered her husband. "First, because he also uses the same position when he is sleeping. It bothers me a lot. This man in the first position lays down as if he is dead. I think my husband sleeps too much. I don't know if my pace doesn't help him to cheer up. And he also has a back problem. I wanted a awakening to happen in our lives, so that together we could open our arms as in the last position and free himself from all the difficulty he has in relationships."

When Dora talked about her husband, Ákila also remembered hers. "I don't know if you know that my husband is addicted to alcohol. He also has mental problems. His disease is at an advanced stage. When I saw this sculpture I connected it immediately to him. On Sunday we went to bed and at 1 a.m. I woke up with my daughter screaming for help. My husband was laying down with his face on the ground such as in the first position at this sculpture. He had fallen down. When I saw him I screamed: He is dying! At that moment he turned his face to the side like in this second position. When I continued to say 'He is dying,' he changed to this third position. When I looked at his face, I couldn't see his eyes or mouth. I could only see blood. When I was saying he was dying, he tried to stand up, but he couldn't. We are
still trying, but he hasn't reached the last position yet. With God's blessing we will get there. For those of you who do not have cases of alcoholism in the family, you don't know how sad it is."

Esperança felt connected to the story of Ákila: "My brother was addicted to alcohol. I had to deal with his problem. He lived in the college dormitory. Only the two of us from my family lived in the city. It was so hard that I kept asking God why I had to assume all that responsibility. I had not placed him in the world. My mother was aging and couldn't deal with him in the interior. I know I had to go through many struggles. We ended up sharing the same house. This was another stage in my life to let God work on my life so that I accepted my brother the way he was."

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The sculptor listened to all the participants reactions prompted by her work. At my request she shared her own process of composing her piece of art.

"This sculpture was the only one I did that I did not want to make public. It was my piece. It was part of the history I was living. The others weren't. The other pieces I did, I had fun doing them; I laughed with them. This was the last piece I did before I had a collection prepared for an exhibition. But I only had 9 pieces and I needed 10. So I had to expose it to the public. When I did it I was in the third stage. I had not yet reached the fourth or the fifth stages. But how could I exhibit an incomplete piece? It didn't make
sense. So I forced myself to reach the fourth and the fifth stages so that I could become public. Today, two months after I composed this piece, I feel I have reached the last stage. [...] I was surprised to see how you received my message. Since I had not done it for anyone to understand because I did it for myself, I was not interested in anyone's interpretation. Many people arrived at the exhibit and said: 'How cute, they are all doing gymnastics.' And it was not gymnastics. It could have been an inner gymnastic you have to do to lift your head. I don't know if you paid attention but in the first and the second positions, they don't have ears. In the second, he only has one ear. In the first, he has none. I tried to convey the message that when you are on the ground, you are completely on the ground. You don't have eyes or face. You don't hear anything. You are facing your sadness, your pain, your unhappiness, it doesn't matter what is happening around you. In the second movement you raise your head a little bit, your ear appears. Finally, at the fifth position he screams aloud - a cry for pain or happiness. He stands up. Next he will find a stone again. He will probably fall and start the process all over again.

"This sculpture does not have a name. It was the only one I was not able to name. I found very enriching this experience here today with you. I might not have accepted this invitation a week ago. I think this was the moment I felt I was feeling stronger to talk about this sculpture. I am receiving a very positive energy from you. I don't know
how to write like you. I love to receive letters. I love to read. But my form of writing is different. I don't even know how to speak in public well. But I know how to touch the clay and transform it. I can give life to something that is dead. I believe this is my way of expression."

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The group was deeply touched by the emotions of this encounter. They were still processing the different type of text they found and the multiple ways of writing. More and more the group was being exposed to the multiple forms of communication and expression such as the sculpture.

The first semester will come to a closing with the next encounter. It will be the 6th encounter. It will be December and together we will celebrate the closing of the first semester and also celebrate our group's Christmas party.

Encounter 6: Discovering the Pleasure of Reading

I handed to Pingo an issue of an English newsletter with his essay published. He was thrilled to see one of his essays published in a foreign language. For those who had not yet seen it, he read the original version aloud as the opening for last encounter of the first semester:

Humbleness and Its Reality

There was a boy whose reality was his best companion. He described it:
I live in a house I hope it doesn't rain.
Every night I have to put up with the mosquitoes.
Once in a while I have to keep an eye on the pans for the mice not to steal dinner.
Once in ten days I go to the backyard, because of the terrible smell from the septic system waters that drain through the floor. I feel sorry for myself, my father and my mother who only wanted to be able to give me better bread. I feel sorry for the cat that fights with the dog for the left over chicken skin from lunch. I pray for the reality to be not so cruel!

Pingo's essay started a discussion on reading comprehension. Maria believes we should assess what we feel. "This is the starting point for new readings. Writing should start with feeling."

Dora said that in the elementary school the students only read to be tested. "Reading needs to be alive and participatory."

Pingo remembered the discussion of the last encounter on the essays of Machado de Assis. While Gaia was talking about one of the characters in the story, Pingo said "I could see the boy in front of me through Dora's words." When he chooses a book to read, the first thing he looks at is at the chapters titles. "If I don't like the title I don't read it."

For Dora it was different. "The titles of Machado de Assis didn't tell me anything." She felt the desire to discover what they talked about.

The pleasure to read comes from the childhood experiences, in the opinion of Bela. "At home I like to read, but I read only for intellectual reasons. I know that I must read professional literature, but it is more an intellectual desire, or I will be left behind. Those who have knowledge
have power. Therefore I must read. But the pleasure I see in Gaia and in my sister, this visceral thing, I am still constructing, but it comes from my own needs. My sister loves to read. She lives the reading; she enjoys it. This pleasure comes from her childhood. You need to have the opportunity to see your parents read; the school needs to encourage the act of reading. It needs to become a priority."

Marcia said that we tend to question why children and adolescents don't read when we also don't like to read. "We read to become updated and to have someone to talk to. We read for obligation, to plan a lesson. I wish I had the time to read for pleasure. [...] Our children also don't have the time to read for pleasure. From middle school on they have no more free time. They read because they will be tested. The school even chooses good books like Iracema of José de Alencar, but they don't give the students any introduction to the book. Teachers don't contextualize José de Alencar, the reasons why he used the language he did. When you register the students at the beginning of the year you receive a list of books to buy. The students look at them and say: 'What a boring list! Do I have to read all this?' We parents try to give the contexts to the books, but we can't provide the pleasure to read them. No teachers put aside a block of time when the students will read in class. They don't ask the students to bring something to read daily from home."

Getting to know about the author helps Dora to understand and enjoy the book. "When I read the article of
someone I know I understand it better. I usually read about
the author first."

Alice felt encouraged to share how she had been using
books in her second grade classrooms. "I usually choose 3 or
4 books and ask the students which one they would like me to
read to them. I read at the beginning of every class. In the
past I needed at least half an hour to quiet them down.
Nowadays, they are the ones who ask each other to be quiet.
Many keep their attention totally on the books. In the
beginning of the year João refused to do any of the
activities I proposed in class. After I started reading to
them in class, his behavior started to change. He still
doesn't do any written activity, but he participates
beautifully orally. I started to value his participation.
[...] Also in the past, when I asked my students to tell
stories in writing, their preoccupation was to get a book and
copy from it. I changed my methodology and started to
contextualize the story to their own realities. When I read
the Elefantinho Malcriado I asked them to tell the biggest
misbehavior that they have ever done in their lives, I
started to give a context to my reading in class. This is now
the activity I most love to do in class. [...] In my
classroom I have a box with books, some are from the library,
others I bought myself."

Pingo felt curious to know how Alice developed her
pleasure in reading. She said that she has always liked to
read, any kind of books. "My first job was in a bookstore. My
father didn't want us to work. I was 17 when I got the job. My father came to me and said: "I'll pay you two salaries a month if you quit the job.' I thanked him and said I preferred to work. When my father bought my books I took good care of them, placing a paper cover over them, drew some flowers on the cover. I loved my books. I also covered all the books from my brothers. My daughter now does the same to her books."

Fernanda was excited with Alice's approach to reading. She also said that in Projeto (Con)texto she had found the approach of the teacher who writes letters to the students important. "I think this is a great encouragement to the students. Because if you write to them, they will have to write back."

"But another important element of my practice" said Alice "is the fact I have books in my classroom, because the students can not be in contact constantly with the books in the library. You can only go to the library at a scheduled time. But if you have books in your classroom, when a student is finished with an activity she can go to the box with books and choose a book to read. It is important to have the presence of a library in the school, but each classroom should also have one. And if the students have their own books they like, they should bring them to the classroom to share." Alice also remembered that at the beginning, when she started to use literature books in her classrooms, the students thought that reading books to them in class was not
a teaching activity. But today, they ask her to read everyday. "Their behavior has started to be transformed," she concluded.

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In his response to the dialogue between Gaia and Alice, Pingo had raised the issue of teachers who teach in the interior who have not yet finished Middle school. This question was revisited by Akila, who asked the group if they thought that just because a person did not have enough education she was stuck in time.

Gaia said that there are many people who are not literate, but have much wisdom to share. "How many times don't we learn in our relationships with humble people?"

Dora was reminded of a very important person in her life. "My father was illiterate, he used his finger print to sign. But he was able to discuss any subject. He had strong opinions. He discussed about everything. The only problem was that he was very authoritarian. At the age of 16 he became responsible for the income of his family and got married at the age of 38."

The ideal situation for a school, shared Maria, is that in the "future we are able to have people with less academic knowledge and more people with the humanistic knowledge that we normally find among less literate people."

"It seems as if the academic person forgets the human side; one thing seems disconnected from the other," said Fernanda.
Gaia brought the issue of writing letters into the discussion again. "In the approach Junior used he emphasized exactly these two aspects of learning: the cognitive and the affective. We can see how connected we have become here. This group became a pleasurable place to be and at the same time there was knowledge and production of knowledge. Through approaches such as this, we can bring the academic closer to the affective in the classrooms."

"Another fundamental element of Projeto (Con)texto," emphasized Dora, "was the fact that Junior said at the very beginning of encounter 1 that in here there is no judgment of what we say. This was very important to me, since even with difficulty I was able to express myself. Since I am sure there is no judgment, I speak. It doesn't mean that we do whatever we want to do. There is no judgment, but at the end he gives a closing to what we say. He encourages us to reflect upon what we say, and we end up realizing we could have done something different. When you are speaking you can fly high; you free yourself. If I had experienced this before, I would have flown higher."

"I agree completely with what you say Dora" said Esperança. "Because in here nobody says, 'No, it's not this way.' Junior gives us all freedom to express our thoughts, whatever is in our minds. And you don't feel pressured to speak. We come from a very repressed generation."
The group ended encounter 6 and the first semester of activities singing the song of Projeto (Con)texto composed by Lia.

Projeto (Con)texto
Projeto (Con)texto
Projeto (Con)texto, o meu melhor lazer

Tendo em suas aulas
Mil opções a oferecer
Da arte e da leitura
Retiro a vida o meu saber

Projeto (Con)texto
Projeto (Con)texto
Projeto (Con)texto, o meu melhor lazer

Reunião de amigos
Trabalho, estudo e muito prazer
Que o ambiente faz
Da convivência real viver

Projeto (Con)texto
Projeto (Con)texto
Projeto (Con)texto, o meu melhor lazer

[Projeto (Con)texto my best type of leisure/finding in its classes thousands of options to choose from/from the art and from the reading/I take from life my knowledge/Meetings of friends/work, study and much pleasure/the environment turns the relationships into a true living].

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The book O que faz o brasil, Brasil? by Roberto DaMattá was distributed in preparation for the next encounter. The group will meet again in January. From the 11 participants, Dora, Gaia, Ákila, Pingo, Maria, Alice, Lia and Esperança decided to continue to meet for one more semester.

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The participants of Projeto (Con)texto were on vacation when I wrote them a letter asking to evaluate the first semester of our work. After receiving their answers, I selected parts of their evaluations and wrote to each of them individually asking for their reflection on the specific part of the letter I had selected. Their results were encouraging as their answers will show below.

Selected part from Gaia's letter:

Under your coordination, we have been developing activities that allow us to grow personally and professionally. I am sure that after each encounter, each one of the participants leaves with new knowledge and renewed to do their work.

In reaction to this part, she wrote:

About what I wrote in the previous letter, I can add that in Projeto (Con)texto we are really doing the reading of the world. Each one of us has their own written texts that are revealed through our silences, tears and anxieties. We are learning to read the text that was not written, but is represented through several explicit forms (modalities of arts) and implicit (in between the lines, in the silence).

Ákila wrote about the importance of Projeto (Con)texto in helping her to gain voice:

I am shy and through these encounters I am having direct contact with people, expressing my opinions and from time to time I speak, and slowly I am feeling more confident in the group.

I liked the books you gave to us. It was a long time since I read a whole book. I liked them, because reading makes us grow and travel in time.
In reaction to her own answer she wrote:

For me [Projeto (Con)texto] is a new way of working with reading and writing with students, giving them the opportunity to speak, even the ones who are shy, valuing everything they might produce. We adults, when we read books, place ourselves as characters, so imagine the children who have a surprising imagination. Another aspect is the group work. Together we come up with new discoveries and this is very pleasurable. I am developing the habit of reading again. Besides keeping me informed it is also a kind of distraction for me.

Alice thought that Projeto (Con)texto would be a formal course where the instructor would teach his students. She found out it was something different:

When you invited me to join Projeto (Con)texto I thought it would be a course where only you would speak and we would only listen. But, in the first meeting, I realized it would be something new to me (and for the other people, I thought). I was fearful at the beginning because I asked myself: how can my little knowledge be mixed with people of much more knowledge than me? How important would my opinions be considering the much broader cultural reality of some of the participants? I thought I had to listen more and speak less. I was afraid of "making mistakes", cutting down my thoughts. But then, I realized that the little I knew and my experiences were of importance to the group. I feel fine. I am participating at an equal level with the others. My fear has no more reasons to exist. I learned that each one of us, independent from the quantity of knowledge, can express well our visions about the context we live in and expand it even more, by sharing them with other people.

In her own reaction to her words Alice went even further:

I believe you know that what happens with me is part of the reconstruction of my letramento
(literacy process). If not, I will explain it by making a comparison with the process of reading and writing through which a child goes. The children create hypotheses, face several conflicts, but at each development they acquire self-confidence, because in the search for answers, starting from their own mistakes, they are able to reformulate their hypotheses, search for new solutions, create and recreate, do wrong and do right. However, they are not able to do it alone. They need an articulator, a motivator who will search for these experiences and situations. And this is the role of the teacher. It is exactly like this that I am feeling. I am reconstructing my own process of letramento, having you as my articulator, motivator and provocator so that we can advance, acquiring self-confidence that many of us did not have the privilege to gain. I also understood that the integration and interaction of children from different levels of reading and writing also favors and speeds up the acquisition of this knowledge. Similarly, in our group which is composed by different levels of letramento, the diversity helps to foster this acquisition of knowledge.

Lia compared Projeto (Con)texto to "Aquarela" a song by Toquinho:

Can you imagine if it was possible to travel without leaving the place? In the "Aquarela" of Toquinho I see Projeto (Con)texto: it is creative, it is light, it is marvelous and comforting.

In Lia's reaction she reflected more about what she wrote and remembered moments of her childhood:

For me Projeto (Con)texto is a trip because during the encounters I experience several phases of my life, especially my childhood. Through my reflections I realized how much I had stored in my mind, unforgettable moments and also relived old facts and good memories that happened to me when I was a child.

Reading Paulo Freire's A Importância do Ato de Ler [The importance of the act of reading], "the reading of the word precedes the reading of the
world" (...the old house, its bedrooms...) all this reminded me of the place where I did my first readings.

It [Projeto (Con)texto] is creative because we have freedom, we are not criticized. The criticism is the biggest enemy of creativity.

"The methodology of its classes is well diversified, always trying to create and discover new strategies so that it becomes more participatory. Creativity starts with reading, fun, fantasy and walks side by side with Projeto (Con)texto, helping it to open new horizons, foster new exchange of experiences, as well as helping to develop the critical thought, the pleasure of reading and writing, making of us active beings, alive and with consciousness.

Esperança found a key for Projeto (Con)texto:

There is a key that opens and closes [Projeto (Con)texto]: it is the freedom to express our thoughts in the way we want, without any repression and more importantly, it is to know that there is someone listening to us.

Her reaction recalled the importance of past experiences:

[The past experiences] which are well kept in our minds, help us to apply in today's reality the experiences lived in the past. These transformations of thoughts will influence mainly our habits in our professional life and will also interfere in our relationships with others.

Dora discovered it is now time to write:

Finally I think I am going to start to write. It is like this: I am writing everything that comes to my mind. I am understanding that to write is to say all we feel, those feelings that are internalized and were locked during our process of learning.

Do you know what happened to me now? I cried. I couldn't hold my tears. It is only now that I feel
that my learning process was very painful, not well worked out, badly solved, maybe because of the oppressive posture of some of my teachers, and the social and economic repression suffered and experienced during my schooling days...

Dora didn't write a reaction to her first letter. She thought she had said enough in the previous evaluation.

It was during the month of vacation that the letters above had been written. I was going to start a new semester knowing about the impact of Projeto (Con)texto on each of the participants. We started semester 2 with eight participants.

**Encounter 7: Setting Goals**

Setting goals was the starting point for the new semester. Following my suggestion, the participants of Projeto (Con)texto took some time to reflect upon what they wished to gain from one more semester of work.

Maria wanted to solidify even more the relationship between all the members of the group. She also hoped to broaden her knowledge about the reading and writing process and the paths, forms, techniques and tools to help other people to learn about reading and writing. With Projeto (Con)texto, Maria reflected, "I realized that there are various ways of working with reading and writing, and this is the focus for me. We have been trying to work well, but with little differentiated forms."

The group engaged in a debate about what writing means. There was a consensus that there was not only one way of writing. You can write with symbols, pictures or letters. It
was also agreed that through writing we are able to read the word and the world, as Paulo Freire taught us.

For Alice, Projeto (Con)texto helped her to go beyond the word. She explained: "When you read a book, you can discuss it with someone if you have a chance, or it will stop there with the reading. You can give life to what you read. And that's what Projeto (Con)texto does. It helped us to give life to what we read. It becomes something important. You read a book because it will give you a thousand ideas and in Projeto (Con)texto we share several types of opinions. And this helps the book to have a different meaning for each one of us."

In reflecting upon the first semester of (Con)texto Gaia believes that the emphasis had been on reading and that now she and the group were ready to start writing. Alice felt that in her classrooms, her students also find difficult to put their ideas onto paper. "I think writing requires a more elaborate thinking. And this is a type of maturation that needs to be stimulated. If you don't stimulate, one walks in front of the other."

The notion that there are several ways of reading was clear for Esperança. A "deep reading," as she called it, was the reading of the sculpture in the previous semester. "We can read not only a book, but you can read in several different ways." The acceptance of each other's ideas was also something that pleased Esperança. "You share what you think, who you are and most importantly, you are listened to.
Because it is always good when other people listen to us. How many people have something to say and wish they had someone to listen to them? So, in here, we find this very rich moment where we share, listen, learn to listen, understand and accept.

Dora shared her happiness in resuming the encounters. "I am happy to be back at Projeto (Con)texto. I hope to grow in my work and in my professional life. I want to put my thoughts into writing. I find it hard to write. I am becoming literate. But I am coming to the conclusion that I don't understand what I read. When I read a book, I only read the pages of the book. When I come here and we talk about the book, then I start to understand what I read." She mentioned as examples the books of Roberto DaMattá, *Que faz o Brasil, Brasil?* and *Os Bruzundangas* by Lima Barreto. "When I read them I thought I had understood in a different way. Through our discussions I read the book again and what was not clear was presented in the group. I don't want to say if I was right or wrong, but it was in the group that I found the answers to my questions."

At that moment I asked the group to "freeze the scene" as a way to analyze what Dora had just said. This was the first time I introduced this technique and I was not sure if it would work. I asked Dora to reflect upon the 3 things she had just told me that she had done. She said: "I read the book, found it to be difficult, then I came to the group and heard many different opinions, after that I read the book
again and my understanding of the book has improved." I took the group a step further and asked: "What would be the next step for Dora?" Alice answered: Write.

Gaia told Dora that when she has a book in her hands she feels like she has someone speaking to her. "So, when I don't understand what I read I say, 'What?' Then it [book] tells me again. Then I say, 'Explain this part better.' It's a true dialogue. My books are all full of notes. [...] I argue with my books or I engage in a love relationship. I become angry, I fight, I argue, I cry and I laugh. I loved DaMatta. This is my process. The authors I have been able to hear enrich my own process of reading. I enjoy my intellectual and affective orgasm."
Dear Junior,

God bless you. It was of tremendous importance in my life to have participated in Projeto (Con)texto for several months. It was something new that happened in my life. It taught me how to expand our readings, making our world more diverse, taking into consideration the multiple forms in which this world is presented to us: we can listen to people, we can read silently, we can read images, gestures, sounds, nature, signs, etc. This type of reading becomes engraved in our minds, intellect or heart. We transform this reading by turning it into writing. We are prompted to write by the experiences of our readings; we free our thoughts and respect our inspirations without the fear or making mistakes or being criticized. We feel there are no barriers when we are writing for ourselves. When we write for others we need to be more careful in the way we are presenting ourselves; we feel we don't have the total freedom of expression.

I wonder whether famous writers write everything they wish or if they impose some limits on them considering their audience.

The freedom of speech was a summit for me in Projeto (Con)texto. Another major change was my way of reflecting upon my pedagogical practice in my classroom. I learned about
the importance of having my students read everyday and learned to respect and encourage the readings they make.

The literary works you presented to us - romance, politics, pedagogy, anthropology, medicine for the Brazilian "diseases" - were all of great importance for our work, and also to discover the amount of readings sources that are around us. The way the group interacted, our share of experiences, our disclosures, our happinesses, expectations, "Café com Letras (Coffee with Letters), comments and food were all very important.

All I have said above made Projeto (Con)texto an innovation in our professional lives. Your inspiration and training put this project up front. And it worked. We feel Projeto (Con)texto has been internalized into our practices as well as we are sharing it with our colleagues at work.

Thank you.

Esperança
Public School Teacher
Fortaleza, Brazil
CHAPTER VI

BEING SOMEBODY: REACHING OUT TO THE WORLD

Setting goals for the new semester invited participants to move beyond the group experience to discuss ways of reaching out to the world. Another of Dora's goals was "to practice my concentration at the moment of reading, and also to understand better or more, the different ways of reading the world."

"Dora, I think you have already started this process," said Gaia. "Yesterday at the meeting you told me: 'Gaia, this is just like reading DaMatta.' You were able to interpret all that chaotic experience and organized it, sharing your reading of that situation with us."

Pingo wanted more changes as part of his goals. "That there may be even more union among us. That our love for books may grow even more and that our creativity multiplies. That more ideas are developed here and that they can reach public schools. And later, when we are prepared we can go to other places, so that we can show what we have learned."

"So you want to share this experience with other people?" Maria asked.

"I could see all of us together doing some work at schools," said Pingo.
"I also thought like Pingo," said Alice. I think that all we learn and share in this group should be spread out to other people or other groups. I mean, to put into practice all we had the privilege to share and what helped us to grow, because no knowledge will have any value if we can not make it available for the other. To reach this point we will have one more semester of maturation. We had 6 months to set the ground. Now, we will have 6 months to build the walls that will certainly be observed curiously by all those who are able to see, listen and act."

Maria thinks that one of the positive aspects of Projeto (Con)texto was that it was not totally structured beforehand. "I think that even you didn't know what it would be like. That's why each person here is important. Because Projeto (Con)texto is made encounter after encounter, depending on the participation and relationship of each one of us. I'll go back to what Alice said, that here we do pleasurable readings. I think we all agree with this. But the biggest importance is not in this. We could read as we used to do in the past. The important aspect here was the socialization of reading. Every time we did something and heard the opinions of each other, sometimes agreeing, sometimes disagreeing, and looking for explanations, this was the enrichment of our encounters. And referring back to what Pingo said: you reminded us of the importance of reaching out to the schools, especially the public schools, that need so much support. Because our reading at the schools is too individualized is
the reason for our poor reading skills. There are not moments like the ones we have here. Teachers say they don't do something like this in the beginning grades because students are not able to read. But they don't do it at High School, either."

"What is interesting," said Alice, "is that when the students reach the university level they are required to have a good mastery of reading. But they could have done this much sooner. Because when we reach the university we are hopeless already."

Dora brought the group back to the discussion about the "no judgment" rule of Projeto (Con)texto. "One very important aspect for me was the no censorship, no judgment, as you say. We can express what we think; we can say what we feel. In here, we are not worried about who knows more or who knows less. And this was fundamental to me to free myself. In our schools we are always judging. The boy feels shy to speak and you don't help him to speak. We tend to say just because the student doesn't speak that he doesn't know. We tell him directly that he doesn't know. How will he ever be able to know if we tell him he doesn't know?"

Gaia also reflected upon the notion of "no judgment," and for her, this is a key strategy used by the group coordinator, who was able to intervene at the right moment. "Had you ever thought that in coming to a reading and writing group you would find so many creative and interesting activities?" she asked.
Esperança remembered the importance of the group diversity, the fact that the group was formed by people with several different professions and levels of schooling. Diversity was the reason for harmony in Gaia's opinion. For Maria, the differences in the group have been enriching for each one. "We would probably not react so well if we all had the same level of knowledge."

**Encounter 8: Being Nobody versus Being Somebody**

What would Brazil be like without Carnival? Maybe a country without identity. In the whole world it is the only country that "undresses itself" from any censorship for five days consecutively. It is a "party" wished by all and expected with much anxiety by all during the whole year. But what does Carnival represent for Brazil?

Roberto DaMatta in several of his books presents his anthropological study of Carnival. In *Explorações*, DaMatta interprets Carnival as "the moment when the Brazilian society doesn't take itself seriously." The Carnival is one medium of expression of Brazilian society, taking advantages of the "fun party" to tell the truth. There is a popular saying that says, "it is in the play that the truth is said." During carnival time, everything is permissible. The rich feel the pleasure to dress up as the poor; the poor wear the costumes of the rich and live a fairytale fantasy; the macho man frees himself and, as a magic touch, stands up in the high heels, hands to the waist and shakes his hips as a professional dancer.
During the finite time of Carnival people feel safe that after the fifth day they will be able to resume their previous life. There will be no judgment as to what happened during the five days of Carnival, because there was no censorship for anything.

I started encounter 8 reading from my written reflections, paraphrased above. The Carnival of 1997 was just one week past. The experiences of this national party was still fresh in our minds.

During the Carnival season we had the book of Roberto DaMatta, O que faz o brasil. Brasil?as our major companion. In his book, one chapter was devoted to the study of Carnival.

Gaia was the first to declare her love for DaMatta's book. She was enthusiastic about representing her reading of this book. She was impressed by the differentiation DaMatta made between the use of masks and the whole costume. "the mask festivals in Europe have always existed, but the Brazilian is such a whole people that they wear the complete costume from head to toe."

"Chapter 4, which is about food, is also very interesting," said Gaia. I had the idea of doing a big collage with people and food. Who is the food in Brazil? It is interesting to understand the concept of food though the anthropological lens: the Indians ate the meat of the dead people that they most respected and they had a special celebration for this occasion. For our reality, food at the
end of the year is interesting, it is a reason for uniting people. My mother never allowed us to say any rough word when we were sitting at the table. The table is a place for celebration. At the church, the priest has the table, and the whole place is prepared for a transfiguration of Christ."

Gaia also compared the group (Con)texto to food, by asking, "What kind of food are we?" Gaia thinks that we represent a fruit salad: "I see us as a salad, because each one of us is respected, each flavor is desired."

The group (Con)texto was also a place of safety. Dora found it safe to be in the group. "The group gives me an identity. I don't know who I am outside this group. Here I am one way, outside I am different."

The reactions to the book that started with the issue of Carnival became even deeper, considering a major issue studied by DaMatta: the house and the street.

"I am a mixture on the street," said Marcia. "I have my own identities, my own characteristics, but outside I am anonymous."

"This identity will only be noticed when you meet someone who recognizes you. With a known person my identity will be known too," added Esperança.

Marcia continued to explain the difference between the house and the street. "I need to enter the house, to meet someone I know in order to be recognized. In the house you can be yourself, with your weaknesses, without having to worry about anyone."
While Marcia was speaking, Dora seemed eager to say something. "I was making a connection with something I experienced. I was in São Paulo and couldn't stand that city anymore. I was eager to meet someone I knew, because I was feeling like a nobody."

"I don't allow myself to be a nobody," Gaia jumped into the discussion. "I know who I am. When I arrive at a strange place, they might not know who I am at first, but soon they will. I had an experience the other day that I would like to share. This week I went to a meeting at the General Hospital and across from the hospital there was a parking lot only for the physicians. I went there for an official meeting of the Mayor's office and we had verbal permission to park in there. The gate keeper was feeling just like an authority, with a big gun on his waist and I was a humble person in my modest car. He approached me and said:

"You can't!"

"But sir, we have a meeting here at the hospital and it is time already. The Ministers are all meeting and they are already waiting for me."

"You can park here only if you have a parking permit."

"All right. You are the authority here and I am the authority there. There's no problem."

When I said this he quickly said:

"No doctor, it's because..."

"There's no problem my friend, I saw a parking space outside."
When I went back in the afternoon, I was approaching the same outside parking lot when I saw that same man waving, asking me to park in the lot reserved for the physicians.

You have only to know how to present yourself. Who am I, that dear nobody?"

Dora helped Gaia to understand that when she arrived at the parking lot she was a nobody, but when she identified herself she became a somebody.

Gaia was still reflective. "I think we need to find ways to become present. You are a somebody and I am also. It's like the song "Sal da Terra" says (Salt of the earth), without harming anyone and without harming yourself."

"Listening to Gaia I am reminded that there are days that I want to be a nobody, so that no one would know who I am. In a different city I feel relaxed, light and ready to fly - I am not anyone. It's almost as if I waited for someone to discover who I am. I like situations like this," said Marcia.

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The idea first presented by Gaia, that is of doing a big collage with people and food, was accepted by the group. They all engaged in the production of a collage that will represent the reading of DaMatta's book. The remaining time was consumed by all participants looking for good and expressive pictures in piles of magazines.
Encounter 9: No Judgment

There was no time in the previous encounter to start the collage suggested by Gaia. We resumed encounter 8 with the idea of continuing the work initiated in the previous session. However, before doing it, the group felt excited to comment on a letter I wrote to them over the two-week interval.

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In the letter I emphasized the need for "no judgment" in the work we do with people. Marcia felt as if by now I knew each of the participants of Projeto (Con)texto individually well. "It's incredible how his letter touched me deeply. I feel a strong pleasure to have a letter like this in hand. I loved it. For many reasons I have not given permission to free myself. I value Dora's decision to put everything onto paper. I have been participating in the group, although I have missed several sessions, because to be here is pleasurable. It is as if I am giving time to myself. I am feeling unstructured, I am looking for a space, a space that will give me the chance... [tears] to structure myself, to organize myself, and I have found this openness in this group and in Junior. When he wrote, 'It's pleasurable to write when you don't have the imposition of a topic to write about, number of lines, when we simply have permission to represent our thoughts visually,' I admired him even more. So, I have been trying to participate more in the group. I don't want to stop coming to this group. I want to reach the end and say..."
how marvelous it was. I have to understand that this has been a phase in my life. Since a few months ago I have been dealing with this unstructuredness. I feel I have to come to an encounter with myself. I thank you and want you to allow this place to be really the space where I will encounter myself [tears]. Because here we don't come to plan, to take to the school that thing that is right or wrong. Because what has happened in my life is that you have to do what is right. [...] I feel we come here to play being friends. I like to be here. Wherever we go there is too much responsibility, too many commitments. I am tired of serving as a model [tears]. I am not like this [crying] because I am weak. Quite the opposite, I am feeling strong today because I can let my feelings emerge to this group. I will not censor myself. It's nothing serious. It's simply because I am tired of being a model. The model of a marvelous mother. The model of a marvelous wife. The model of a person who devotes her life to studying. I am finding it marvelous not to be a model here. I am learning a lot, especially through my relationship in this group with Pingo and Gaia and all of you. I am feeling fine here. I am not in here to do everything right. I can make mistakes here. ...I feel as if we play school here. It is important we take this experience to the schools and to the teachers. It is important that in the study sessions we have the chance to play. We are adults but there is still a child inside of us."

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Gaia helped us to reflect upon the reality of many writers who started their writing process prompted by personal problems that made them write: "A classic example for me is Agatha Christie. She had a huge personal problem in her life. Her husband betrayed her terribly. She was hospitalized as a crazy woman. That experience had been a big surprise in her life, something she could never have imagined. Since then she started looking for things that no one has ever imagined. Therefore, Agatha Christie's books all have the suspense issue as their main characteristic. Her writing is very similar to Sherlock Holmes. Her books present discoveries that, while you are reading them, get you involved in the story, and you have no ideas where things can come from. Starting from a painful experience in her life she was able to develop this immense potential she already had. This is what is pretty in her. There is a thinker that says that the harmony is in the chaos; the equilibrium is in the chaos. Each moment of depression, of breaking up, of loss in our lives is a moment for being reborn, to discover another way out in your life that you had never experienced before."

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Time again was consumed and the collage was postponed to the next meeting. The emotions had taken up all the time today and the participants felt enriched by the sharing of experiences that took place in this encounter.
Encounter 10: Representing a Brazilian Reality

The group was small in this encounter. Only 3 participants were able to go. All the pictures cut in encounter 8 were on the table ready to be pasted onto the large construction paper.

Even with the small number of people, we participated actively. What to represent? DaMatta makes us travel along this immense country that Brazil represents.

The idea was to draw a big map of Brazil, and within the country paste the multiple contrasts found in this large nation. "But what about the Carnival?" Gaia asked. Maria thinks that the Carnival is no longer the main issue. In her opinion the mask is more representative of Brazilian reality. "People tend to cover up things in Brazil as if they were wearing a mask." The purpose of the collage then is to make visible what seems to be invisible by some people.

The table was full of pictures representing the major Brazilian contrasts - the rich and the poor; the authorities and the common people; all kinds of food and culinary are represented; all ethnicities as well.

After selecting all the pictures from the magazines the three people, four with myself, realized we could not represent the reactions of four other people. The representation of DaMatta's book was postponed again for the next encounter.

Instead, the group engaged in a pleasant conversation about books they had recently read. Verbal recommendations
were shared. We felt impressed by the amount of authors Gaia had already read. She enchanted us with so many stories to share and excellent recommendations.

**Encounter 11: Understanding Writing**

As the group became more and more involved with reading and writing, I decided it was time to devote more time to writing as a way to encourage all participants to create a space in which to write. This space needed to find a beginning at *Projeto (Con)texto*. Starting in encounter 11, every meeting would begin with 45 minutes for free reading or writing.

It was important to create an atmosphere for this moment. As participants entered the room, soft classical music played in the background. That sound was soothing for a Saturday morning. It was calming and it was inspiring.

The smiles on people's faces showed their approval of this new moment created at *Projeto (Con)texto*. There was no need for instruction. When they entered the room they found me writing. They sat down quietly, looked around and started doing the same. This moment worked as a preparation for a productive and pleasant day.

When Pingo arrived, the papers and books spread out on the table and the music strongly encouraged him to write. "When I saw all this, all I wanted to do was write."

"I liked this moment," said Esperança, "because when I get home I have no more free time to write."
"At my school I wish we had more time to read in class, but teachers say we have many activities to do and there's no time to read. They say we must read at home. But at home we have no time to read," stated Pingo.

"This moment for me was as important as if we were reading the most important book of classic literature. It was a very rich moment," said Maria. The importance of choice was also emphasized by Maria. She found important that each one of the participants chose what they wanted to do. Nobody told another what he or she should do. Some people decided to read, others decided to write and others decided to meditate with the song.

The music was also used as a timer. The length of the music from a CD was the time devoted to this first moment. When the music was finished this first moment was concluded. There was no need to clap hands, speak loudly, or make any kind of announcement that would break the relaxed atmosphere created by the music.

This moment will be repeated throughout the 5 remaining encounters.

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Esperança wrote a letter that she would like to share with the group:

I am borrowing the expression from Donald Murray when he says that he writes to witness. Today I would like to share in writing some of my own experiences lived in a real way. It is true that when we are going to witness we are referring to another person who did something or is about to do something. We know that the biggest witnesses of
life are reported in the books of the book which is the Bible. Jesus once said that the witness is true when we have seen or heard from someone else. Therefore it was needed that John Baptist be sent by God to the world to talk about Jesus and His mission even before He was born. Similarly the prophets witnessed 600 years before Christ's birth. ... I want to say that the biggest witness I can share is of my personal experience with Jesus Christ, since I have accepted Him in my life. ...Thanks for the opportunity to share in Projeto (Con)texto something so marvelous that happened to me.

"When we experience something, the words we use to speak about this experience come out in a very convincing way," said Alice. In her opinion this is the reason why many people have the power of words.

The letter written by Esperança provoked good discussion about the importance of creating spaces for students to speak in class; share their ideas, and feel valued by what they share. The courage to share starts with a monologue by the student herself, who writes for her own benefit as a conversation with her own self. Then comes the need to share with another person; and finally, with a larger group. These three steps towards the courage to share one's life is explained by Maria who had been listening carefully to the whole discussion. "First you engage in a conversation (through writing, painting, drawing) with yourself, in search of meaning for things that happened in your life; then, the need to share your thoughts with others, or at least with one other person can be very healing; these two first steps serve as a preparation for exposing yourself to a larger audience," said Maria.
Alice was happy with the work she had been doing in the classroom. She reads to her students at every class meeting. "They love it" she said. "I ask them to choose from my pile of books the one they would like me to read to them today and place their book in the 'reading box'. Sometimes they choose 10 or more and I tell them I can't read them all." When she started reading to her class she was the one who chose the books, but later she realized it would have more value to her students if they were the ones to choose their own books.

Dora asked for Alice's idea on how to use books in her school. She was thinking about asking the students to choose one book they would like to read from several options, and elect one student to read it to the class. "What do you think?" asked Dora.

"In 5th grade we know it is more difficult to work with reading and writing, especially when you ask one student to read to a whole group. The students fear making mistakes. We who are so well instructed still fear making mistakes. Even in sharing an opinion they fear participating. So, I would first give them time to browse through books, something like 'book time', for each student individually. And later, when this type of activity becomes a habit, something usual to them, then you could propose the type of activity you were planning," answered Alice. It is her opinion that the students need to be educated first to reading. When they become familiar with books, then the results will be easier.
"If you start without previous preparation of the students, they might interpret your suggestion as an imposition. Another thing you could do is ask the teachers to read a chapter of a book a day, following the sequence of a story," continued Alice.

At this moment I helped the participants of Projeto (Con)texto to realize that the answers to our own questions most often can be found within the group to which we belong. Like the sharing of experience between Dora and Alice, they did not need to hear from me. They learned from each other. This same kind of sharing can happen in a classroom where students will learn from and with each other.

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I decided to share what Alice wrote in her letter at the beginning of the second semester with the whole group, using it as a text for reaction. I distributed photocopies of her letter and asked Alice herself to read it to the group:

It is always a surprise for me when you send us your letters, the content of which most often is our own dialogues or writing. And I always ask the same question: 'Did I say this?' or 'Did I write this?' I feel admired because the act of sharing my own reading of the world, and even writing about it, has not become something natural to me. I think these are remainders of my 'fear of making mistakes'.

I believe you know that what happens to me is part of the reconstruction of my letramento (literacy process). If not, I will explain it by making a comparison with the process of reading and writing through which a child goes. The children create hypotheses, and face several conflicts, but at each phase they acquire self-confidence, because in the search for answers, starting from their own mistakes, they are able to reformulate their hypotheses, search for new solutions, create and

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recreate, do wrong and do right. However, they are not able to do it alone. They need an articulator, a motivator who will search for these experiences and situations. And this is the role of the teacher. It is exactly like this that I am feeling. I am reconstructing my own process of letramento, having you as my articulator, motivator and provoker so that we can advance, acquiring self-confidence that many of us did not have the privilege to gain. I also understood that the integration and interaction of children from different levels of reading and writing also favor and help to speed up the acquisition of this knowledge. Similarly, in our group which is composed by different levels of letramento, the diversity helps to foster this acquisition of knowledge.

I don't know why I made this comparison. I guess I needed to contextualize my experience in the project with my own reality in the classroom. I also want to say that Projeto (Con)texto has helped me to transform the classroom into a less tedious place for me and my students, where reading and writing can have a meaning in their lives. I only hope to be such a good motivator and articulator as you are.

"It's pretty, isn't it, her letter?" said Maria.

I asked the participants to write Alice a letter in the forthcoming weeks in response to the letter shared today.

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Sitting on the floor, participants of Projeto (Con)texto worked on the representation of the theme Carnival. I asked them to represent on large pieces of construction paper whatever came to their minds when they thought about Carnival.

After the representation, I played a song with the theme of Carnival. I asked the participants to create a web of ideas next to the representation they had just made. They listened to the song and their hands started to jot down on the paper any thoughts or ideas that came into their minds.
that reminded them of Carnival. When the music ended I asked them to continue writing the web of ideas, this time including their personal experiences with Carnival.

"This experience reminds me of DaMatta's work where he writes about the other self. Carnival also reminds me of what is prohibited or hidden," shared Maria. For Dora, it was an opportunity for people to free themselves, especially the men, who take advantage of the Carnival to be who they are not allowed to be during the other days of the year.

Memories of loneliness, passion, and desire were moments remembered by Akila and Alice. Carnival for the two of them had never been a moment for celebrations. It was during a Carnival that Alice made the decision to separate from her husband. "It is during 'Carnival' that a person drops their masks and reveals the very intimate self of herself and here I remember DaMatta's book," said Alice.

For Lia, the time of "Old Carnivals" is missed. The songs of today are different from the traditional songs she used to dance. Therefore, she misses the celebration of Carnival as it used to be.

When Esperança lived in the interior, her dream was to participate in a Carnival party. However, her father never allowed her to. When she moved to the city, she did not miss the first chance to dance Carnival. She was disappointed. It was not the image of the Carnival she had in her mind. She only danced it once and never wanted to celebrate it anymore. For Esperança the Carnival is the paradox of the Brazilian
society, because it is during this celebration that people do what they normally don't do or are not allowed to do during the normal days.

"I remembered my Carnivals at the clubs," said Gaia. "I loved to prepare my costumes for those days. I only have pleasant memories of those days." For her, the Carnival is a result of a collective work and all that is in the unconscious of each person emerges to surface.

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From all that was shared by the group, which word or expression could represent what was said? "Explosion of feelings", "the drawing of a box", "realization of fantasies" and "fantasy" were the words or images generated from their experiences stimulated by the theme Carnival.

Alice explained why she decided to draw a box with the help of Ákila. "Because the box is where people save with much care everything they cannot show. Only during Carnival do they open it up and let everything come out of the box".

For Pingo and Gaia, the Carnival is the time for fantasies, to develop some aspirations. It is the time when the Brazilian population tries to forget the sadness and the anger, trying to take advantage of the happiness brought by this celebration.

At the end, the group decided that the word "fantasy" best conveyed what Carnival is all about.
Encounter 12: Opening the Doors to Visitors

As the participants entered the room they listened to classical music. The stereo played Mozart. As usual, they arrived and engaged themselves in reading or writing.

After a while, before transitioning to another activity, I asked the group about the type of music they were listening to. "Baroque," said Gaia. She continued, saying that Mozart wrote his first music composition at the age of four. "He had a teacher who was very envious of him. He wanted Mozart to play according to the music notes, but this was not his style. Mozart was a genius. He faced many financial struggles. He was an artist and could not envision a life full of norms. He used to miss his appointments. His teacher ended up becoming crazy. He had a good knowledge of academic music, but was not able to see the genius in Mozart."

"Is this kind of life common for many artists?" I asked the group. According to Maria, there are people in Brazil who ended up in a similar situation. "Many local artists, especially the elders, have had their moments of fame, but now they live a life of poverty," she said.

Gaia reminded us of a famous statement by Ché Guevarra, "to fight, yes, but never to lose the sensitivity. The popular radio stations that reach the masses only play music that show no horizon. It is hard music." In her opinion, this type of hard music creates a generation of brutal people, who can't envision a better future for themselves. This generation of brutal minds also becomes narrow minded without
being able to use all their hidden potentialities. "If these students became sensitized by music they would certainly become more sensitive people. Classical music is needed in our school," said Gaia.

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During the past week I received a telephone call from Esperança who informed me she would not be able to continue to attend the Projeto (Con)texto sessions. She was becoming a "woman with a voice", she told me, and this development had been creating marital problems. Her husband had prohibited her from continuing to attend the group. I could feel in her voice that this was not what she wanted for herself, but she had to accept the situation to avoid more problems at home. The group was not the same without Esperança.

As I informed the group of Esperança's decision, Gaia became really angry. Being a very independent woman, she couldn't accept this kind of "machismo" decision. She wanted to serve as mediator between Esperança and her husband, but Alice advised her not to do so; it would only make things worse. "People gain voice in Projeto (Con)texto and we have to help them to keep their voices," said Gaia, still processing her anger.

Gaia suggested that Projeto (Con)texto be expanded. "More people need to know what we do on our Saturdays," she said. Her idea was that from the next session on, we allowed visitors to come in during the last 2 hours of the meetings. The participants of Projeto (Con)texto would still have 1 and
a half hour of privacy before the guests arrived to join the group during the "Coffee with Letters" break. The idea was accepted by all and we decided to try it for 3 Saturdays, and evaluate our experiences on Encounter 16, the last one. It was agreed that each participant could invite one guest to join Projeto (Con)texto from 9:30 to 11:30 AM during the next 3 encounters.

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Dora was coming to the conclusion that the study sessions she coordinated for the teachers in her school were no longer serving them well. "They don't want to study technical aspects anymore," she said. For one of her study sessions she decided to take the essay written by Jane Hansen that has been translated into Portuguese - "Why Read?" - because she wanted to convince the teachers to read to and with their students every day. "I used Jane Hansen's essay because she tells the story of how she became a reader. She didn't consider herself to be a reader until she was 40 years old, because she didn't share with others what she read. She learned to share with a first grade teacher who read on a daily basis to her students. Two teachers in my school started immediately to work as the first grade teacher who taught Jane Hansen." Looking at the table in front of us, full of books, Dora said, "I feel like these [the books] are all my friends." Reading for Dora has also become an enjoyable part of her life.
Encounter 13: The Shaping of "Contagious" Action

Dora continued to be excited with the implementation of new ideas in her work with teachers. "From our experiences in this group and from the suggestions given by Alice and also from Jane Hansen's text, we have considered devoting one day a week to doing something like we do here," shared Dora with much excitement. She continued, "Of course, one of the books I'd like to share with them is The Rainbow Fish. It was a very rich experience here. We are also using music. I have been placing several books on the table in the classroom and asking the students to choose one they would like me to read to them. When I'm finished, I ask them to talk in pairs about the story, and later, I ask them to represent the story using any means of representation. When they are finished, I ask for volunteers to share what they did with the whole group. One student wrote, 'When Dora read this story I was deeply touched and entered the moon world and could only remember this story.' Another student said: 'From this story I understood how the writer feels when he writes the story.' He also was in fifth grade. Another one said, almost jumping from her chair, 'It was so beautiful, teacher!' What is even better is because when it's 11 o'clock [school ends at 11:15 am] we feel light and proud that we did something."

Maria asked Dora if they were already doing this type of work in all classes. She confirmed they were. "We want the teachers to multiply this idea. They are asking the students to represent the story using pictures from magazines, they
make collages and all others kinds of representations." Dora had been trying all sorts of activities. She had also experimented with classical music. "I took a CD of Mozart to class and asked the students to identify which instrument they heard better than the others. They identified the flute. Then, one of the students said, 'I can play the flute.' Next class, we will start the day with the student playing the flute. And also, the father of this student knows how to make flutes with bamboo. They will learn how to cut the bamboo tree and make flutes." Dora realized how much the students could learn if a unit of study was all planned around the bamboo theme. Gaia asked Dora if she had already introduced drama as part of her activities. She responded saying she had not yet, because drama is one of her limitations, but she had asked the help of the assistant librarian who loves drama.

Even though Marcia had not been able to attend all sessions of Projeto (Con)texto, the few she had were enough for her to start applying new strategies in her classrooms. Marcia, after quitting her job as the head of the language arts department at the ministry of education, was teaching teachers-in-training at the high school level. She said, "I'm teaching three classes: literature, Portuguese language arts, and a practicum in Portuguese. I took children's literature to share with all my classes, and they loved it. They suggested that I bring more books, and they chose to create performances about the stories. Yesterday, my first-year students brought pieces of fabric and made puppets from the
characters of the books and performed for the class. Another group decided to create a new story based on the original story they had read. Another group created a photo album. Yet another group wrote a book. They really enjoyed the opportunity to write. However, another group asked, 'What about the Portuguese language itself, won't you teach it?' I told them they would not waste all they have produced. I told them we would not only study how to teach Portuguese, but I would also integrate the other disciplines into their activities. The encounters here with you have been very important for the innovation of my work."

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Maria introduced Enio Resende, the author we were reading, and his book on citizenship. "I really liked Enio Resende. He seemed to be very real. What he presents is not unknown to us. We experience the reality described by him on a daily basis in our lives, or have heard people refer to similar situations. All the cultures he presents in his book are still strong in our relationships, life and work."

The theme of citizenship led Pingo to invite his mother to write about citizenship in Brazil. "When I asked her she said, 'I don't know how to write anymore!' She only attended up to 7th grade. But then I told her, 'Mom, write anyway.' And she wrote." Below is the text written by Pingo's mother:

"The citizen has to fulfill his duties, has to be honest. He has the right to communicate with people from his community, follow the social rights; needs to be humble and
loyal to people and at his work. He needs to respect the rights of others."

Pingo asked, "What is your opinion about citizenship in Brazil?"

His mother wrote:

Not all duties of the government are being fulfilled. There is much misery in the poor districts. The majority of children are hungry and don't go to school because there's no seat for them and also because the parents cannot even afford the price of the shirt of the uniform. This happens to people who live around me.

This is happening because the government is not fulfilling its promises. It already provides the books to the students, but it should also create an exception for those who cannot afford to buy the shirts of the uniform.

These citizens cannot be forgotten.

"The composition of Pingo's mother reminded me of what Paulo Freire calls the political illiterate," said Gaia. She continued, "The fact is that many people go through an alienated or domesticating schooling experience, while on the other hand the politically literate person is able to read the world. And what Pingo's mother did was to read the world. This is what reading means. It is not only the linguistic decodification, because when the alfabetização (print literacy) and now letramento process is domesticating, the action lies in the linguistic approach. It is believed that when the student learns to work with the syllabic families, he is already literate. In this domesticating and alienating view, to read means to join letters, it is a purely linguistic reading, rough, decontextualized. In a reading of
the world view, which aims at forming a citizen with a political approach, learning is exactly this. You don't need to have much knowledge stored. You need to be alert to interpret what is around you."

Paula, one of our guests in today's encounter said, "In a few words she [Pingo's mother] was able to present clearly what citizenship is; she wrote about rights and duties with sensitivity. And this is what is pretty, her sensitivity to what is around her and to people who are around her. In her community, people do not have rights, they have problems. She is sensitive to what is in the community."

Gaia also said, "And she goes even beyond that. She has the understanding of organization and participation, because she knows that an isolated action is extremely weak, has no sustainability. But from the moment you have this understanding of the world, this reading of the world, and you are able to create a space where you can express your opinion, you contest, suggest - this is the experience of citizenship in itself. But all starts from understanding. From understanding you can get organized for the citizenship action."

"The problem is that she worries about her spelling and handwriting," said Pingo.

"But this is what the school emphasizes - spelling - the right way of writing. The content, what people want to convey about their visions of the world, doesn't matter," said Alice.
"Last week I asked my teacher if she could ask our colleagues to write about citizenship, but only one wrote. I'll read to you what Cristiane wrote:"

The Brazilian citizen has rights and duties that most often make people angry because their rights are printed on paper but are not put into practice...

The lack of interest of some politicians also makes this situation worse. This situation should not be a concern, instead it should be an example of an organization where the laws will be implemented, making sure the citizen's rights will be guaranteed.

Although the practice of citizenship in Brazil is not one of the best in the world, we find some good examples of people who fight for it and help to improve a little this major problem in Brazil. We must find the courage to transform our Brazilian citizenship that is so forgotten by the majority of government authorities.

Not all citizens fulfill their duties, and the lack of interest of some ends up creating problems for others.

The time for which some citizens have to wait to have their rights guaranteed is so long that people feel discouraged to fight for them. And many people only say, 'This is Brazil.'

This saying, that conveys the slow speed at which things are solved in Brazil, reflects the pessimism of people, and can even bring bad luck. In order to change it is not enough to speak only. We have to act as well. We can not just wait for the politicians to take the initiative or simply hope that something will fall from the sky.

We cannot be voiceless, because those who are voiceless are passively accepting the situation.

Many citizens believe that it is not worthwhile to waste their time looking for something that will take too long. Therefore, they don't do their part, and that would be of great help to transform the society.

People need to unite themselves to make these laws that today are only in the paper become reality. We should never give up the chance to transform this country from the so called third world, to a county where all the laws will be fulfilled, valuing justice and abolishing the hypocrites.
"I also wrote about citizenship," said Pingo. He got his composition and read it to the group:

From my point, of view the majority of Brazilian people don't know well the meaning of being a citizen. They let cruel people do whatever they want for their own benefit. And the people still contribute to these 'cultures' that will only help to strengthen those who think they have Brazil in their hands. But they are mistaken, because little by little, children are having the opportunity their parents didn't have.

Each person has his own point of view and all feel the anger for this misery that we find in our country. Therefore, we must fight to be able to be citizens in this Brazil!
- Son, bring me my medicine.
- Which one, mom?
- Anyone that will be good for headache.
- Will this one serve?
- Which one?
- Citizenship.

Pingo held a page where he wrote in large and colorful letters: "CITIZENSHIP - SOON IN BRAZIL."

Flor, another guest today said, "This dialogue and closing sentence deserves to be in a big billboard." Pingo is congratulated by all.

"It is impressive to see what a 7th grade student is able to do in a public school," said Gaia. "He is an educator," said Paula.

Maria felt excited with the 'contagious' action, in which one person can bring others along, in the classroom, in the school and in the community.

"How can we do this?" asked Dora.

"We must start at home," said Lia, "Just like Pingo did. He interviewed his mother and later he involved his colleagues at school."
Gaia feels it is important to help others, but she feels there is something else to do. "We have to take it a step beyond, towards the political demand." She mentioned the church as an example. "Besides campaigns, I think the church has another goal today, which is the political conscientization for action. We see that today the movements of people have some political basis, depending on the priests."

"I would like to share an article I saw in the newspaper that we could translate as citizenship or lack of," Maria said. She continued, "From my point of view citizenship is not a word, it is not an ideal, it is not something from our imagination. It is translatable and needs to be translated into action, even if it is very small. But we must fight for this idea, which most often is seen only as an idea. We must turn it into practice, in life, on a day-to-day basis, with my rights guaranteed and my duties to others fulfilled. Citizenship is something enormous - one thing seems to be connected with another. For example, the last paragraph of the newspaper article is an example that our authorities do not have the minimum sense of what citizenship is, or respect for the rights of the people. You need only look at the photograph and you will see a social poet like Patativa do Assaré, a man with little schooling, who wrote seven books. Look at what they say here:

Patativa do Assaré became known in all of Brazil. He received honorarium titles, honors and trophies. He was congratulated by intellectuals, governors and
the President of the Republic. Last year, he received the prize as the best promoter of popular culture in a celebration held at the Ministry of Culture. Today, at the age of 88, famous and fragile as a result of the years, Patativa is back to Serra de Santana [a poor area in the inland of the state]. The little money he received with the selling of his books was shared with his family. His source of inspiration is endless. He continues to write poems" (Diário do Nordeste, March 4, 1997, p. 11).

"My reading of this situation says that 'it is not paternalism I am looking for. An old man, at the age of 88, spent all his life making culture, and presented us with a large work of poems, today is poor. He is poor, and will die poor, but what kind of honors does he receive? Only formal honors. There is no preoccupation to see what his life is like, what his needs are. There's no care for the person. It is not paternalism I am proposing now. There is only a need to care," Maria concluded as encounter 13 ended.

**Encounter 14: Finding Poetry in the World**

The poetry of Patativa do Assaré was revisited at this encounter. Maria's reflection in the previous meeting prompted me to present a poem written by Patativa to serve as a stimulus for discussion. The beginning of the poem reads:

"Cante lá que eu canto cá"
(Sing there that I sing here)

Se aí você teve estudo,
If in there you had education,
Aquí, Deus me ensinou tudo,
Here, God taught me everything,
Sem de livro precisá,
Without needing a book,
Por favô, não mexa aqui,
Please don't trouble here,
For Gaia, the poem of Patativa do Assaré is a comparison he makes between the two worlds. "He is not fool. He has a good understanding of the world. In order to know, you must do. He did not need to study any theory to discover that you must do in order to understand. Those who know about the life in the sertão [hinterland] are those who deal with it. I think he has this comprehension and conveys it in his own language, the language from the sertão, the language of the poet who discovers beauty in nature. He sees the world as a book. His book is the world. He reads the world and understands it. He finds poetry in a flower."

"He finds happiness in his way of living. He is very authentic in his own way," said Dora. Maria connected to what Dora said and stated, "What Dora said is very important. We
don't feel any kind of complaint in his poetry - 'poor us'. He has an amazing strength."

"He makes confrontations," said Dora, but "He respects differences - sing there, that I sing here," concluded Gaia.

"And he is very critical of the 'doctors' [in Brazil, people with university degrees] who go to the sertão and do whatever they want, believing they know it all. However, they don't know that reality," said Alice.

But for Maria, this reality is not present in the sertão only. "This also happens in the various social levels. What we are reading is a comparison between his world as a man from the sertão of Ceará to the 'doctors,' as Alice said. But also the 'doctors' of the capital. She said something that reminded me of what we see in the newspapers at every change of government that makes me feel really angry. The groups from Brasília [the capital of Brazil], the 'doctors,' organize committees to come to Ceará to look at the drought. Isn't it the same thing? Only the characters are different. For me, it follows the same line of thinking."

"I would like to make a connection to the moment we are living now," said Gaia. "The mayor hired technicians from São Paulo to implement an administrative reform in the city of Fortaleza. When we read the document written by the technicians from the South, there were things completely unapplicable to our reality. We had to organize ourselves to recompose the document. It could not be adopted because it did not recognize our basic reality. We are competent people,
and well trained. They [technicians] could have stayed where they were, and we would have stayed here. But they were paid a ton of money, and we here had to work hard to make changes, wasting time and making no extra money. So this reality is still happening in all spheres of society."

"We saw just last week on TV," said Maria "the case at the motor vehicle department in São Paulo. In that city, where the elite of Brazil live, the fact is that if you don't pay US$ 100.00 for a despachante [someone who serves as a mediator to speed up the process for you] you will encounter a whole bureaucracy created to complicate things. Finally when someone decided to denounce the situation, someone important appeared quickly to help. The computer was already off, but since the press was present to show everything, the computer was turned on again without any complaint."

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The poems of Patativa do Assaré are written in popular language, without considering proper spelling or syntax. The group debated the reasons why poems like Patativa's are not studied in the schools. For Gaia it is simple: "The language is not grammatically correct." For Alice, "the language of the school reflects the elite language." Dora explained, "a popular poet writes the way he hears, and he doesn't write for commercial purposes." Alice remembered that since she was young she saw popular poetry such as the literatura de cordel (string literature) for sale in the squares. I don't think its value lies in the commercialization of the booklets.
People like them because they can appreciate the booklets at the squares. "When I was a supervisor in a private school we encountered much difficulty in convincing the youth to promote a Week of Literature. They had no interest," said Gaia. "I think the youth don't value literature because they don't know it," concluded Maria.

Encounter 15: Not to be Just Anyone

A musician and composer was our special guest today. Arlindo Araújo, the author of "Qualquer," presented at the introduction of chapter 1 in this dissertation, was invited to share his art of composing music.

Arlindo started describing his process of composition. "I rarely say I am going to write. Someone comes to me and says, 'Arlindo, compose a song for me'. Then I will search in my emotions for something to write about. Sometimes people give me the melody, with the rhythmic division. Therefore, motivated by this kind of request I compose the song with all emotion. But I need someone to ask me to do it. I only compose when people demand it from me. I don't feel ashamed to say so. This is my way of doing things."

The instruments and place used by Arlindo to compose are simple. "I like composing with lined paper and pencil. When I sit down in front of a computer to write I find it extremely difficult. I don't know if it is my reaction to what is modern. I love to write with pencil. I feel excited when I see the composing process. When it is finished I read it all
and underline the words that are not in the right place. Then I write it on the side and never erase the original text."

Maria was curious to know about Arlindo's musical training. "None," he answered. "How did you learn to compose?" she asked. "I had an excellent music teacher at public school. And he was an excellent conductor. I owe my musicality to this teacher who touched me, who encouraged me. In the town where I was born people used to promote folk festivals with band music. The band conductor was the father of my Portuguese teacher. So opportunities met one another."

Arlindo played the tape with "Qualquer". The music was calming and invited us to a moment of reflection:

Anyone

It turned into a bird, any bird/But to be anyone, it didn't want to be anyone/From any sky, any neighborhood/To mate with any cotovia [type of bird]/And it turned into a bird, any bird/Son of the moon, the night and the day/Beak of a cloud, wing of the wind/Anyone sang any song/Anyone became an indifferent bird/Without voice, without profession/Without place, without home/Any marital status would fit/But to be anyone, it didn't want to be anyone/It turned itself around and became light of day.

"That's true, nobody wants to be a nobody, not even the bird wanted to be one," said Gaia. This song reminded her of the concept of the house and street created by DaMatta. "At home you have your own identity, your own world, in there you are respected and known. When you are on the street, you are anyone, you mix with others. On the street you need a space
to create your own identity. Even the bird did not want to be anyone."

"In the case here, the bird is the singer himself," said Arlindo. "Even any marital status would fit him."

"There are phases in our lives when we become anyone. Life offers us opportunities. It is at the moment of being anyone that you discover your own identity, things that you had never imagined before," said Gaia.

"At the moment that it decides that it doesn't want to be just anyone, it [the bird] decides to turn into light of day and become just energy - but, it didn't want to be just anyone so/It turned itself around and became light of day," shared Arlindo.

For Maria, this song makes a direct connection with citizenship. "And it is," confirmed Arlindo. He continued, "I think you all had a clear perception of this song. I chose it on purpose because I knew it would generate some discussion. I was careful when selecting the text to present."

Maria was still curious to know more about the process of composing this song. Arlindo said that "it was originated in a pub by the beach, that his band - Quinteto Agreste - owned. There were no other spaces in which people like us could present our work, so we decided to open our own pub. It was a good and bad experience. It was good as a space to promote our work and for practice. In there we sang every Thursday, Friday and Saturday. I used to say that it was a live rehearsal. At those moments we experienced new songs."
Our public was our lab. So we were at the pub, and Eudes, the interpreter of this song, approached us at the table with the tone 'lá, lá, lá'... and asked, 'don't you want to compose the lyrics for this?' We did it together at the pub. It was night."

Gaia was still processing the lyrics of this song. "At the same time it is an invitation for reflection, it also talks about light issues. It's a poem. You were able to extract your poem from nature. You talk about real and true things. You invite us to reflect."

"The verse I like best is 'wings of wind'. For me wing means fly, and it is windy really," said Arlindo.

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Gaia presented the group with another song the theme of which again relates to citizenship. In fact, the title is "Citizen," a composition of Zé Geraldo:

Tá vendo aquele edifício, moço?/Ajuidei a levantar/Foi um tempo de aflição/Eram quatro condução/Duas pra ir duas pra voltar/Hoje, depois dele pronto/Olho pra cima e fico tonto/Mas me chega um cidadão/E me diz desconfiado/Tu tá aí admirado ou tá querendo roubar?/Meu domingo está perdido/Vou para casa entristecido/Com vontade de beber/E pra aumentar o meu tédio/Eu nem vou sonhar com o prédio/Que ajudei a fazer.

Can you see that building, sir?/ I helped to build it/ It was a time of affliction/I had to take four buses/Two to go and two to come back/Today, after it is done/I look to the top and feel dizzy/Then a citizen approaches me and asks/Are you just admiring or do you want to steal?/My Sunday is completely lost/I go home sad/All I want to do is to drink/And to make my tedium even worse/I won't dream with the building/ that I helped to build.
Tá vendo aquela escola, moço?/Eu também trabalhei lá/ Lá eu quase me arrevento/ Pus a massa, fiz cimento/ Ajudei a rebocar/Minha filha inocente/Vem pra mim, toda contente:-Pai, vou me matricular!/Mas me diz um cidadão:/Crianca de pé no chão, aqui não pode estudar/ Essa dor deu mais forte/ Por que que eu deixei o Norte?/Eu me pus a me dizer/Lá a seca castigava/Mas o pouco que eu plantava/tinha o direito a comer.

Can you see that school, sir?/I also worked there/In there I almost hurt myself/I made the clay and the cement/I help to build the walls/My innocent daughter/ comes to me excited/ -Dad, I'll register there!/But then a citizen comes and says/-Bare feet children cannot study here/This pain was even stronger/Why did I leave the North?/I kept asking myself/ In there the drought was strong/But the little that I planted/ I had the right to eat.

Tá vendo aquela igreja, moço?/Onde o padre diz amém/ Pus o sino e o badalo/Enchi minha mão de calo/Lá eu trabalhei também/Lá sim, valeu a pena/Tem quermesse, tem novena/E o padre me deixa entrar/Foi lá que Cristo me disse:/-Rapaz deixa de tolice, não se deixe amedrontar/Fui eu quem criou a Terra/Enchi o rio, fiz a serra/não deixei nada faltar/Hoje o homem criou asas/ E na maioria das casas, eu também não posso entrar.

Can you see that church, sir?/ Where the priest says Amen/I placed the bell and the ringer/My hands were full of calluses/I also worked there/But in there, it was worth/There were prayers and festivals/And the priest lets me in/It was there where Christ said/-Man, don't feel sad and fearful/I was the one who created the earth/ I filled the rivers, I made the mountains/ I didn't let anything lack/ But today men created wings/And in the majority of the houses, I am not allowed in either.

For Alindo, this song reflects the society we live in:
"The society that forces people to have such different social levels," he said.

Ákila liked the part when God welcomed the man. "And not everyone accepts God's words." Alindo again said, "At the
moment people don't accept the brotherhood principles, they don't accept God either."

**In Summary**

Fortaleza, 30 July 1997

Dear Junior,

I could never have imagined that my life would change 360 degrees with *Projeto (Con)texto*. Not only my professional life, but my life as a whole. Again, I am facing a challenge even bigger than when I joined this project. The success of this new journey will depend on my availability and competency to socialize this new knowledge I have acquired in our encounters, making it believable in our failed educational system. To make this happen I have to break the fear of reading, writing and facing the people with whom I have to interact. We only overcome fears when we face them directly. I want to be able to convey in a clear and creative way (what you know how to do so well) all my process of *letramento*, so that in a short future we can multiply our army of readers and composers of the world.

The experience and sharing of the reconstruction of my *letramento* is making me feel responsible for the transformation of my professional context. I have to invest in my dream of seeing our public schools with an excellent level of quality in the training of conscious and participative citizens who will be builders of knowledge and transformers of the world.

Today I feel I am a historical being more conscious of the importance of my role as an educator and citizen. I feel I am a literate being (ser letrado). In what follows I compose a celebration of *Projeto (Con)texto* from what I feel is a fruit of what has been planted in it.

EU! UM SER LETRADO    ME! A LITERATE BEING

Ontem, só ouvia        Yesterday, I only
   e pouco entendia.       heard and little
No silêncio vivia,     I lived in the
   muitas vezes refletia.  silence,
Entretanto, nada fazia. However, I did nothing.

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Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
O medo minha voz reprimia.   
não sabia as respostas!   

Que respostas?   
As respostas que queriam   
dos livros que a mim traziam

Queriam suas respostas   
e não as minhas.   
Só suas leituras entendiam.   
E as minhas?   
Nada valiam.

Que espécie de pessoa tornar-me-ia?   
Omissa, submissa, passiva?   
Para nada transformar?   
Seria mais um, sem direito a sonhar.

Não ouso culpá-los.   
Inconscientemente, sem maldade, reproduziam somente, o que eram na verdade.

Fomos (ou ainda somos?) joguetes, deste desumano Sistema, que na ânsia pelo poder, nega à maioria o saber, para não igualar-lhes a existência.

Hoje, por sorte ou teimosia.   
Pela sede de saber, aprendo a cada dia o prazer de ler e

The fear repressed my voice
I didn't know the answers!

Which answers? The answers they wanted from the books chosen for me.

They wanted their answers and not mine. Only their readings they understood. What about mine? They were not worth anything.

What kind of a person would I become? Neglectful submissive, passive? To transform nothing? I would be one more, without the right to dream.

I don't dare to blame them. Unconsciously, without malice, they only reproduced, who they really were.

We were (or are we still?) playthings, from this inhumane System, that in the eagerness for power, neglects knowledge for the majority, in order not to equalize their existence.

Today for luck or stubbornness. For my thirst of knowing, I learn every day. The pleasure of
escrever the reading and writing
e transformo o meu to transform my daily
dia-a-dia. life.

No futuro serão muitos, There will be many in
construindo com este the future
prazer, building with this
um saber compartilhado, pleasure,
quê tenha significado, a shared and
onde todos possam VIVER. meaningful
knowledge

Hugs,
Alice
Public School Teacher
Fortaleza, Brazil

Encounter 16: Looking Back at the Experience

Encounter 16 was the last meeting of Projeto (Con)texto. It was time to look back and evaluate the influence of the work throughout the nine months the group had been together.

Receiving the books to read was the most important aspect of Projeto (Con)texto for Akila. "Through the books I rescued my habit of reading again. A teacher needs to be constantly reading." The experience at Projeto (Con)texto helped Akila to open doors, "I'm discovering myself at the Projeto. I've realized I'm able to create." Speaking in public was a challenge for her. "But the group made me feel safe, and I knew no one would say I'm right or wrong. There was no judgment." She reflected back to her childhood: "At home we were not allowed to express any opinion. We had to be quiet when an adult was speaking. This was very damaging to me. In my school, for example, the teachers beat us in the hands. I was afraid of saying anything. The teacher constantly pinched our ears. I was beaten several times..."
because I didn't speak. I feared everything and everyone. When the teacher walked between our desks, I got very nervous. I feared her. At home I feared my mother. She liked to beat us much. My mother never kissed me, at least that I can remember. Maybe when I was a little baby. I can't remember her giving me any care. You can imagine the adult I became.

"We lived in the interior and felt very hungry. To save us from dying of hunger, a nun went to our home and sent each one of my brothers and sisters [there were 12 children] to a different home in the capital city. I was 8 years old when I left home. At that age I worked all day long, washing clothes and dishes by hand. In exchange for my work I was given food and schooling. I went to school in the evenings.

"I got married when I was 15, right after I finished 9th grade. I stopped studying for 10 years, because my husband, a very machist man, didn't allow me to study anymore. Ten years later I went to high school and attended the 3-year teacher training program. I became a teacher in 1990.

"I have only one daughter. When she finished middle school she begged me to register her at a private school. I had to make this sacrifice. She is a very clever student. Since she joined the private school, where we pay US$ 140.00 a month, I haven't bought any piece of clothes or shoes for us. My husband doesn't work, he is alcohol addicted. I have to support my family with my monthly salary of 520 reais (approximately 510 American dollars)."
"Since I was a child I have always wanted to become a teacher. I played at being a teacher with my girlfriends."

***

"Reconstructing my own process of literacy" was the most important experience of Projeto (Con)texto for Alice. "When I joined Projeto (Con)texto we started to contextualize our readings, making connections to our day-to-day life. Reading became more meaningful to me. To reconstruct my literacy means to be a true reader. To be a true reader means to find pleasure in reading and sharing like Jane Hansen said in her essay 'Why Read?' To be able to make connections is what makes a reader a good reader.

"I try to make of my classrooms places of pleasure and not obligation. I want the student to come to class because he likes to be in the classroom, and in the school. And for this to happen a conscientization process is needed. I believe that reading and reading with pleasure helps people to accept themselves better and become more conscious of things.

"I believe that pleasure comes from the habit of reading. You cannot discover whether you have the pleasure of doing something if you don't do it.

"The way I want to practice reading in my classroom is different from the way I was educated. I was taught to read for obligation, to fill out the reading questionnaires. If reading has no meaning to my students, then it is not worth doing."
"What I find important in Projeto (Con)texto is that I am experiencing this pleasure of reading myself. If I had not experienced this pleasure I could not convey it to others."

***

For Gaia the constitution of the group was the most important aspect of the experience in Projeto (Con)texto. "Because of the various training and styles of living of the people in the group, we learn and grow a lot. When I say learn, I am not referring to the cognitive only. We learn to be more and better. I already had the understanding of reading as the reading of the world. But in this group we gave it more color. It is always enjoyable when we find people who believe in what we believe. Projeto (Con)texto was a context in itself."

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"I'm a very shy person," said Lia. "I've always wanted to talk to other people. Because of my shyness I couldn't do it. Projeto (Con)texto helped me to free myself. I found the support here and learned a lot in the relationships with colleagues here. The constitution of the group in itself was very important, as Gaia also said. I felt myself very comfortable here.

"I also liked your methodology of writing letters. When we write letters, a lot comes from inside of us and we end up freeing ourselves more. In letters we can say anything we want to say without having to worry about the correct spelling or punctuation. Everything comes from the heart. And
all we do with love is good. Projeto (Con)texto is like a therapy for me."

***

For Maria the best experience was the "human contacts. Especially the complementarity of each one of us; the different levels that complete each other so well. A boy like Pingo taught us so much. He said so many important things that made me reflect along with all teachers who shared so many important experiences in this group."

Another aspect of the group emphasized by Maria was her realization of how one can learn from people who apparently have less knowledge than us. "When I say less knowledge I am referring to book knowledge. Maybe this is not the best word, but it is the one that comes to mind."

***

Dora's participation in Projeto (Con)texto helped her to gain a new voice and become less shy. "I am still shy, but the way we have been working, together with my work at the school, makes me feel I've grown considerably."

Projeto (Con)texto also helped Dora to better understand the process of reading: "I am able to compare how I used to read and how I am reading now. It is like I am giving more life to my reading. I have better understanding of what I am reading. As for writing, I still have a long way to go. I start writing but do not finish it."

***
Pingo valued the unity of the group, and the support he has received from each one of the participants. "We do some work and our work is valued by each one here. I feel valued here."

"When I look at the mirror I say: 'I've changed a lot.' When I came to Projeto (Con)texto I didn't like to read much. With the experience here, I am reading more, writing more and drawing more. The group makes me feel this way. Everyone here has had a strong impact on me."

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In this encounter Projeto (Con)texto came to an end of its first year. The group met throughout 16 Saturday morning sessions. Every encounter was an invitation for new discoveries.

The day of the 16th encounter was noted by Gaia as being exactly the day of the 9th month of existence of Projeto (Con)texto. In her own words, "we are being born today."

The actions initiated at Projeto (Con)texto will continue for one more semester since the group wishes to do so. It is the hope that Projeto (Con)texto can find ways to reach out to new members and communities. For the purpose of this research, the 9th month of Projeto (Con)texto represented the conclusion of a fieldwork and the birth of this text.
PART III

"PROJETO (CON)TEXTO IS LIKE THERAPY FOR ME"
CHAPTER VII

LOOKING AT BOTH SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

What counts in fieldwork is what is going on in your mind.

- Harry F. Wolcott

As the plane landed in my hometown in mid August of 1996 I was full of anxiety. There was much going on in my mind: What if my plans don't work? What if I don't find volunteers to join my research group? What if they are busy and have no time to devote to my project?

Throughout the first month of preparation and nine months of action in the field I constantly shaped and reshaped my original research plans. The development of Projeto (Con)texto directly reflected the involvement of each one of the participants and my twofold role in the group as researcher and involved participant.

The composition of this chapter prompts me to come to terms with my status and role in Projeto (Con)texto, drawing a distinction between the traditional role of researcher as "expert" and a postmodern role of researcher as "team member." Only after the conclusion of my fieldwork experience and two-thirds of this phase account, have I realized the similarities between the work I have conducted in Northeast
Brazil to a socially responsive approach to educational research presented by Stringer (1993). For Stringer, a socially responsive research process should be:

1. Democratic - enabling participation of people
2. Equitable - acknowledging people's equality of worth
3. Liberating - providing freedom from oppressive, debilitating conditions
4. Enhancing - enabling the expression of people's full human potential (p. 148)

These four core values - designated hereafter by DELE - provide the foundation for a liberating and enhancing approach to social activity. The implications of a research approach that takes into consideration the values of DELE will be presented in the final chapter. In this approach, the participants' well-being is defined by the perceptions and values of the people involved in the activity within their local contexts. However, in order to practice a liberating and enhancing research approach, changes in the role and status of the researcher are needed.

Two Sides of the Same Coin

As I have presented in chapter 3, my role and status in Projeto (Con)texto was one of an involved participant, where I became a learner from people. While in the field with my research group, I was not interested in preaching or evaluating, nor in searching for prestige or status (cf. Glesne and Peshkin 1992). My experience in Projeto (Con)texto invited me to become a team member. My expertise was applied and transformed by the agendas of those who were engaged in
the research, in order to fulfill their needs and for their own benefit (cf. Stringer, 1993). During the nine months of fieldwork my agenda was shaped and reshaped by the development of Projeto (Con)texto. The research process was led by the participants of the (Con)texto group.

As noted by one of the participants of the group during an informal conversation with me, "by the end of the ninth month we had dropped the word Projeto (project) and we were naming ourselves the group (Con)texto or simply (Con)texto." The word "project" implied a formal activity of research, whereas "group," or simply "(Con)texto," reflected better the more informal character of that group and the lived experience shared. Hereafter, I am also referring to the group as (Con)texto only.

As a team member of (Con)texto, my social interventionist approach allowed me to be what I am calling two sides of the same coin: at one side I was the researcher conducting fieldwork and at the other side I was the social interventionist, facilitating a process of change. Like a coin, I flipped my role from one side to the other as situations demanded a different intervention from me.

It is not an easy task to balance this dual role as inquirer and interventionist. It would have been easier to be an aloof observer, but to do so would have contradicted my own principles. Since I entered graduate school, I had envisioned doing a type of research in which processes and
outcomes would benefit all people involved in the inquiry process.

As a young researcher I doubted I would find space in the academic university to conduct research like the one I envisioned. Contrary to what I expected, I found support in the academy to be an inquirer and a social interventionist at the same time. I didn't have a name for this approach, until after I had finished fieldwork and was introduced to the work of Stringer (1993), whose socially responsive educational approach to research bears many similarities to what I envisioned and carried out in this inquiry.

It is important to note, however, that Stringer's approach was developed for a different setting and for different purposes, and I am not applying them unchanged to a Brazilian context. I found in Stringer the validation of my vision that a research project can benefit all people associated with it. His work has not influenced directly my actual research. It helped me to know that there are experienced researchers who share a similar vision to mine.

**The (Con)texto in Context**

In what follows I have tried to portray categories for analysis that I have identified as key to the process of (Con)texto development. Wherever possible, I have expanded the discussion to include related data shared with me in informal conversations with the group participants. I have also submitted the list of categories to the participants of
(Con)texto, who validated the ones I had identified and suggested the addition of one more.

"Even you didn't know what it would be like": Authorship

Maria was right. I had no idea what to expect from (Con)texto. I trusted I would invest the best I could, and in return the participants would do the same. From the first to the last encounter there was enthusiasm and surprise. The participants of (Con)texto became authors of the group process. They were free to choose what they wanted to do and my own plans were changed to meet the group's needs and interests.

The non-structuredness of (Con)texto was an important element for the success of the group. My role was not to initiate all activities. Instead, I planned minimum interventions that would serve as stimuli for the group discussion. The outcomes of the initial prompt depended on the participation of each of the group members.

Not knowing what to expect from each encounter of (Con)texto served as a motivating factor, since there was something new happening at every encounter. The group plan, as said before, was constructed by the participants and myself. The shared leadership helped to give responsibility to each participant, who became responsible for the success or failure of the group. In other words, they also became authors of the process.

The participants of (Con)texto were encouraged to feel the responsibility of being authors of a process. As
contrasted from what is expected in many educational settings in Brazil, i.e. a banking-type education as described by Freire (1970), where the students passively receive the knowledge poured into their heads by an instructor, in (Con)texto the learning process was an outcome of the amount of engagement of each group member.

Alice shared an expectation that in (Con)texto she would learn from me, "the instructor", but she soon realized that in that group what she knew was as important as the knowledge from an "expert." Participants of (Con)texto learned to learn from each other and I learned to intervene only when necessary. What I discovered was that the participants were better able to speak at a more understandable level, sharing realities well known to them, and therefore, what they said to each other was more meaningful than what I might have said.

My role in (Con)texto became more of an editor than an author. As an editor I helped the group to rephrase some of their thoughts to become more understandable. I helped them to see what apparently seemed to be invisible. However, as an editor I also felt transformed by the authors. Some of the information or strategies I found important to share or implement in (Con)texto were proved to be unnecessary by the group, which had something more meaningful and applicable to offer. I simply helped them to maintain a space for ideas and for the actions which emerged from them.
"When I wrote this I thought of my father": Personification

Lia described (Con)texto as a trip where one encounters several phases of his/her life. In her case it was her childhood: "Through my reflections I realized how much I had stored in my mind. They were unforgettable moments, and also relived old facts and good memories that happened to me when I was a child."

The activities experienced in (Con)texto encouraged the participants to "travel" back in time to relive pleasant and not so pleasant experiences. When reading one essay by Machado de Assis, "O Pai contra mãe" (The father against the mother) Gaia was reminded of the love of her caring father. Marcia found in (Con)texto a safe place where she could play being friends and was allowed to drop her masks of being the model person. She used the space of (Con)texto to be her whole self. The theme of "Carnival" was not remembered by Alice as times of celebration and happiness. The theme reminded her that it was during the season of Carnival that she decided to separate from her husband. The book of Paulo Freire, A Importância do Ato de Ler (The importance of the act of reading) reminded Ákila of her painful experiences in school. She feared being beaten in the hands by her teachers. She became fearful of expressing her thoughts, and as an adult considered herself to be extremely shy. Being a shy person was also an issue for Lia. She has always wanted to be different, to be more talkative with other people. She found the support in (Con)texto, and learned from the relationships.
with her colleagues. "(Con)texto helped me to free myself", she said.

(Con)texto was also a trip into the world of reading for Alice. Jokingly, Alice once told me that she feels like "Alice in the Bookland". She has always liked to read. Her first job, as we remember, was as a saleswoman in a bookstore. One of the crucial contributions of (Con)texto for Alice was the contextualizing of her reading, and learning to make "connections to our day-to-day lives. Reading became more meaningful to me" said Alice. The experience in (Con)texto helped her to discover the true meaning of being a reader, a reflection prompted by the reading of Jane Hansen's essay, "Why Read?". The answer to her inquiry was found in the group. With the help of the essay by Jane Hansen, and her own experiences in the group, Alice came to the realization that what makes a reader a good reader is "to be able to make connections."

Dora felt she needed to do something different in the study sessions with teachers in the schools where she is a supervisor. The experiences in (Con)texto and the support she received from the other group members helped her to create a new way of working with her teachers. She knew they no longer wanted technical information. She transformed some of her study sessions into experiential moments like the ones in (Con)texto. Knowing that Jane Hansen considered herself to be a reader at the age of 40 served as encouragement for herself and for the teachers she worked with.
Dora did not limit herself only to the teachers. She also reached out to the students. She started reading books with them, and worked with songs and other forms of texts. Dora was one of the people in the group who applied her experience from (Con)texto in her work setting.

Being a student, the natural environment for Pingo was his own home. His work with his mother, encouraging her to write, and showing that she was able to write, was another example of the extension of (Con)texto, this time, to the home environment.

(Con)texto helped the participants to learn from their own lived experiences. Instead of looking for knowledge in books or outside sources, participants of (Con)texto engaged themselves in a personal search first, taking knowledge from inside of them. Constructing new knowledge over lived experiences allowed the group members to get to know each other better, and to value what each person brought into the group.

The learning process in (Con)texto started at the personal level. In preparation for Encounter 1, I sent a letter to each participant, asking them to bring to the group something that represented them as persons. The sharing of personal experiences occupied the discussions of the first encounters.

The personification of the experiences in (Con)texto made it easy for the participants to apply what they had learned in their personal and professional lives. Who they
had become was extended to what they did in the multiple facets of their lives.

"More people need to know what we do on Saturdays": Extension

As early as Encounter 7, Pingo, the only student and adolescent in the group, reminded us all of the importance of reaching out to the schools. I was aware of the power of (Con)texto participants in promoting transformations outside the Saturday meetings. However, the need to transform had to come from the participants. Needless to say, I was happy to hear Pingo, the youngest of all, raise the first flag.

The first initiative to open the doors of (Con)texto to other people came from Gaia's idea of having visitors attend the encounters for a month. Each participant of (Con)texto could invite a guest who would attend 3 out of the 4 hours the group met. The first hour was devoted to the (Con)texto group only, to deal with issues that concerned the group. The idea worked fine. The guests learned from the group and also shared their knowledge with us.

Alice shared the excitement of Pingo. She believed that what was learned in the group needed to be spread out to other people and groups. In her opinion, "no knowledge will have any value if we can not make it available for the other." However, Alice thought the group needed one more semester together (after the nine months were finished) to start the dissemination phase of (Con)texto.

The actions of (Con)texto members moved progressively from their personal lives to their work setting, and
initiated the process of reaching out to other people and places. I understand this as a natural progression and part of a process of acquiring confidence in what a person is doing and learning. Participants of (Con)texto needed time to become empowered to start disseminating. A semester later, after the fieldwork for this dissertation was finished, several group members started to disseminate what they learned in (Con)texto in different ways. Alice for example, started a teacher development program at her school. In an informal conversation, she told me she would have never faced a group of teachers if she had not been in (Con)texto, since she does not have a university degree.

"I don't allow myself to be a nobody": Identification

"I know who I am. When I arrive at a strange place, they might not know who I am at first, but soon they will," said Gaia. Coming from a well connected family, having a good education and working in an administrative position, Gaia could easily fit the category of being a 'somebody.' The title for the opening statement is also hers, reflecting her refusal to be a 'nobody'.

To be a known person ('somebody') versus being unknown ('nobody') was, in my opinion, one the richest issues of discussion in (Con)texto. The discussion emerged from the reading of Roberto DaMatta's book, O que faz o brasil, Brasil? The two concepts were known to all participants, but not the daily experience of being one or the other.
Contrary to what someone might think, to be a 'somebody' is not always wanted by that 'somebody.' Marcia was an example of a 'somebody', a person in an administrative position, considered to be a model professional, a model wife, who got burned out by being a 'somebody' and wished some days, to be a 'nobody', "so that no one would know who I am." Only by traveling to a different city could she find the peacefulness of being unknown ('nobody').

The experience of traveling to a different city and not being known, which would be ideal for Marcia, was not appreciated by Dora: "I was in São Paulo and couldn't stand that city anymore. I was eager to meet someone I knew, because I was feeling as a nobody."

I want to reinforce that it is necessary to understand the relational universe of Brazil in order to function consciously within its society. The notions of being "somebody" versus being "nobody" developed by Roberto DaMatta, play an important role in the daily function of Brazilian society. As I have presented in chapter 1, being somebodies and nobodies play different roles in the realms of the family ("the house") and in the public arena ("the street") in Brazilian culture.

"How many times don't we learn in our relationships with humble people?": Expanded Definitions

The notion of being literate was a key concept that was transformed or expanded by the majority of the participants of (Con)texto. Through experiences with multiple forms of
expression and communication, participants realized that the notion of being print literate was too narrow to define a literate person. Dora was reminded of her father who was considered to be illiterate ("He used his fingerprint to sign"), but on the other hand, he was able to communicate about any subject and managed his business successfully. Based on her experience at (Con)texto, Dora believed her father was not illiterate, but only unable to use print literacy.

Gaia believed that the relationships with people she called "humble people" can be very enriching to any human being. In her opinion "there are many people who are not literate, but have many literacies to share." The importance of learning from all people and from all the diversity of experiences was an important lesson learned in (Con)texto.

Recalling one of the definitions of literacy presented in chapter 2, Dora and Gaia have presented a definition similar to Eisner's who believes that a literate person not only construes or expresses meaning in written language (print literacy), but does what the tongue makes possible (to speak, to inscribe language into text, to decode text). A literate person is able to construe meaning using different forms of representation available in a social context (reading, writing, dance, music, the visual arts, etc.).
"I feel valued here": Validation

The feeling of being valued and learning to value other people, emerged as an important characteristic of (Con)texto. The group had one single rule that will be presented in the following section. This rule was "no judgment".

Pingo was an important example of someone who was not valued outside the group, considering he came from a poor class, lived in a poor neighborhood, was black and went to a public school. In (Con)texto, however, he felt he was heard, appreciated, valued and accepted. As an outcome of his experience in (Con)texto, Pingo said, "I am reading more, writing more and drawing more."

Alice felt at first she had very little to share with the group. After a few encounters she changed her mind and "realized that the little I knew and my experiences were of importance to the group." Feeling she had something to share with other people helped Alice to feel valued, and placed her at "an equal level with the others." What first was presented as fear turned into confidence. She learned that independent of the quantity of knowledge someone has, each human being has something to say about the world they live in and can expand their knowledge by sharing what they know with others.

A practical example of validation took place in Dora's school while she was teaching a lesson. If you remember from chapter 6, Dora asked her students to identify the instruments played in an instrumental song. One of the instruments identified by the students was the flute. At that
moment, one of the students shared that he knew how to play
the flute and that his father knew how to make flutes with
bamboo. In the following class, the student's and father's
knowledge was valued and shared in class with all the other
students. I am sure the students will never forget how to
make flutes with bamboo and the father will always carry with
him the feeling that something he knew was important to other
people.

Learning to value people is one of the outcomes of
learning to listen to people. While at first it might appear
easy, listening to people can become quite a rare occasion in
today's world. As Esperança reminded us, "How many people
have something to say and wish they had someone to listen to
them?" In (Con)texto, participants found a space where they
could "share, listen, learn to listen, understand and
accept," concluded Esperança. If we turn these five actions
suggested by Esperança into a summing equation of share +
listen + learn to listen + understand + accept we will be
close to learning to value people, or simply, the equation
will = validation. This process is not as smooth as the
equation might seem. It requires a change of behavior first.
Learning to share, learning to listen, learning to understand
and learning to accept demands practice from the people
engaged in the process of learning, so that they become able
to learn from their own experiences and bring to a level of
awareness their assumptions, goals, values, beliefs and
communicative modes. As presented in chapter 3, this is the
core function of cultural therapy, and it will help the participants to perceive the biases they bring into their social interactions and their acquisition or transmission of skills and knowledge.

"Affection is the key": Caring and Contact

This category is included by request of the group as they helped me to revise these categories. "Affection was what made this group possible," said Gaia. In her opinion, affection in (Con)texto is defined by the care each group member has for another. For example, "when we don't agree with an idea, we care for the point view of the other, even if it is different from ours," said Gaia. Another example of affection is represented by the way participants treated each other in the group.

In Gaia's words, "There's love." This love is conveyed through the hugs, touch and kisses exchanged among the participants. In summary, Alice suggested, that affection is represented through the "touch". "We touch each other with love," she said. Ákila shared how important it was for her to arrive at the group and to be received with hugs from the participants. "It's so comforting. We feel the warmth from the other human being. This is so important," she said. "A hug restores our energy," shared Gaia. For Alice, "It is like being carried in someone's arms." Gaia also reminded us that "a hug is a form of language." Alice continued, "it is a silent way of communicating affection."
Taking into consideration the multiple forms of languages experienced in (Con)texto, the language of affection could not have been left out. I am glad the group reminded me there was something missing in the categories I presented to them. I agree with them all: affection was key to the development of (Con)texto.

Affection is also key in Northeast Brazil. Northeasterners are known by their human warmth and visceral feelings. This affection is represented in the dance found in this region of the country, where one body touches another to create a dance harmony. In a dance called Forró, arms and legs create a synchrony of gestures, with parts of the body touching each other with much affection.

A group like (Con)texto, developed in Northeast Brazil, could not have been conducted without affection. In the schools where participants of (Con)texto work or study, teachers and students exchange affection on a daily basis. A child kisses the teacher and vice versa before going home. Games and other play activities conducted in class include hugs, holding arms and hands, and other kinds of affectionate touch.

Affection in (Con)texto was related to the language of the body. It was related to the issue of caring for the other with love and respect. At the same time it encouraged more learning. There's a tendency in today's society to separate the cognitive from the affective, According to Eisner (1994), this separation "is reflected in our separation of the mind
from the body, of thinking from feeling, and the way we have
dichotomized the work of the head from the work of the hand"  
(p. 23). This is another important example of the function
all human senses play in the process of learning.

The seven categories presented above - authorship,
personification, extension, identification, expanded
definitions, validation and caring and contact - are
representative of the process in which the participants of
(Con)texto were engaged. When they joined (Con)texto they
found a non-structured group that would be structured by the
their interests and experiences. To become authors of
(Con)texto they needed to learn to share their personal
experiences in the group. Participants started to realize
that the transformations they were experiencing in the group
were reaching beyond the group boundaries, creating a need to
extend the group experience to other people. Within
(Con)texto, participants felt they were somebody, but for
some, the reality outside the group changed their identity
into one of a nobody. The group experience invited the
members of (Con)texto to expand their own definitions, such
as who they considered to be literate and illiterate. With
these new definitions, they started to value more who they
were and to value other people in society. Finally, we were
taught of the importance of caring for people, and how
important contact is for building human relationships in a
Brazilian context.

Interventions that worked in (Con)texto
In this sub-section I will present some of the interventions I made during my facilitation of (Con)texto encounters to foster discussion and group participation. One might see these interventions as the "(Con)texto approach."

**Writing Letters**

I first experienced the practice of writing letters to the students in classes taught by Jane Hansen at the University of New Hampshire. Before Encounter 1 I wrote a letter to the participants of (Con)texto, a routine I continued throughout the time the group stayed together.

According to Gaia, writing letters helped the group to experience two important aspects of learning: "the cognitive and the affective." She continued, "We can see how connected we have become here. This group became a pleasurable place to be and at the same time there was knowledge and production of knowledge. Through approaches such as this, we can bring the academic closer to the affective in the classroom."

Except for a few occasions, all letters were sent to the participants by mail. I chose the old "snail mail" on purpose, because I believed that receiving an envelope at home, touching the paper, tearing it carefully, paying attention to a new stamp, and unfolding the page with care would have a greater impact. My belief was confirmed by several of the participants. Dora, for example, kissed the envelope when it arrived in her home and pressed it against her heart as a way to represent the affection she felt for the letter. Several times I received unsolicited letters in
my home mail box. It was always a pleasant surprise. At the beginning of the second semester of (Con)texto, Gaia decided to send me a letter every day, for 7 days. In each letter she chose a theme to write about. They were themes related to her personal life. Each letter was written on a different and beautiful letter paper.

During (Con)texto encounters, participants commented to one another about the letter received the week prior to that encounter (since we met fortnightly) and very often thanked another colleague for sending a letter to him/her. Letters also encouraged me to write more.

Contents of my letters varied from letter to letter. At the beginning, my letters served as a summary of what had happened in the Encounters of (Con)texto. I realized it was becoming repetitive and I was no longer finding pleasure in writing. I decided to write freely. I sat in front of my computer blank screen and started to write whatever came to mind, trying always to make some connection with (Con)texto. Marcia once told us in the group that I knew each participant so well that I seemed to address them directly in my letters.

Writing letters became "contagious" in (Con)texto in the same way that I was "contaminated" by the letters of Jane Hansen in the classes she taught. The exchange of letters was a very important intervention for creating an atmosphere of affection in (Con)texto. Moreover, writing letters turned out to be a good learning tool. They encouraged all of us to read and write more.
Representing Personal Experiences

For the first encounter of (Con)texto I asked the participants to bring to the group something that represented them as a person. Starting at the personal level helped the participants to get to know each other.

I introduced myself first, not to serve as a model, but to show them that in that group I was also a participant. Sharing the person I am made me feel included as a member of (Con)texto. This intervention served as an "ice breaking" activity and its use in Encounter 1 seemed to be appropriate.

In Encounter 2 I asked the participants to represent how they had learned to read and write. This intervention helped to show the participants that within (Con)texto there was a diversity of ways people learned to read and write. Some people read magazines, others read books and yet others did not have any reading material at home.

Asking the participants to represent personal experiences helped them to see that the experience of one person is not necessarily the same for another. Within (Con)texto, the diversity of ways that the participants learned to read and write served to caution us that we cannot teach all students the same way. Esperança learned to read and write through reading magazines and newspapers. Àkila did not have access to books in her childhood. Gaia grew up among books and was encouraged to read by her mother who read frequently.
This intervention also helped the participants of (Con)texto to recall personal experiences and to represent them by using multiple forms of communication and expression. I will write more about multiple forms of representation in what follows.

Reading and Composing in Multiple Forms

As human senses are multiple so should be the forms of reading and composition. According to Eisner (1994), "the senses are our primary information pickup systems and provide the content through which our conceptual life takes form" (p. ix). The concepts constructed throughout our lives, such as reading and composing, are images formed from our own experiences that are captured by our senses. Reading and composing may also take advantage of our multiple senses.

The multiple forms of reading was summarized by Gaia as the "reading of the world". In her opinion, "each one of us has personal written texts that are revealed through our silences, tears and anxieties. We are learning to read the text that was not written, but which is represented through several explicit forms (modalities of arts) and implicit (in between the lines, in the silence)."

In (Con)texto the participants had the opportunity to experience multiple forms of text representation: collages, songs, pictures, photographs, drawings, books, newspapers, magazines, gestures, and sculptures. As Esperança reminded us the reading of the sculpture was a "deep reading.". By "deep reading" she referred to the fact that it provoked the
emergence of emotions in her when recalling personal experiences. Esperança was reminded of her struggle with her brother who was addicted to alcohol. This was also a powerful experience for other members of (Con)texto. Marcia was able to read the sculpture, step by step, finding cohesion in the five stages. Dora was able to find in the sculpture a reading for the apathy of her husband. Akila shared about her daily struggle with her husband who is addicted to alcohol and has mental problems. The reading of the sculpture was received differently by each participant, and reflected the activation of different images that were formed by the experiences of each person.

The written language is only one way through which our lives, feelings and thoughts are represented. The multiple forms of reading and composing our world create the opportunity to enter unique worlds by using our senses of sight, touch, sound, smell, taste, and intuition.

Reacting Organically

This was not an easy intervention for the participants to understand. When I introduced the notion of "organic reaction" to a text (all forms of text), the tendency they had was to summarize what they had read, to repeat what the author had written about and to describe what they were seeing, touching, listening to, smelling or tasting. Two guiding questions helped to clarify what I wanted to convey to them by "organic reaction" to a text: "What does this text
make you feel?" "Does it remind you of anyone you know or any experience you have had?"

In response to their readings, participants represented their organic reactions to a certain text by using the multiple forms of representation. Esperança, for example, drew a picture of a bone in response to her reading of *Os Bruzundangas*. "Reading Lima Barreto was as hard as eating a bone." It was a text difficult to understand, especially because "he decided to write with difficult words," she justified her organic reaction.

The notion of organic reaction means that the reader does not respond to a text rationally only and does not limit herself to facts. When she lets the text enter her whole body, the outcomes of the experience will be a combination of ideas, memories, feelings, and gestures, stimulated by the multiple human senses.

Choosing Stimuli for Reaction

Among the many texts (music, sculptures, paintings, etc.) I could have used as stimuli for reaction, I chose books. Reading books was not part of the daily or even weekly routine of most participants of *(Con)*texto. For Ákila, for example, it had been almost 10 years since she had read a whole book. For lack of time, money or, simply, for the lack of the habit of reading, books did not represent a priority for most *(Con)*texto participants.

As I presented in chapter 3, participants would read Brazilian books to serve as stimuli for reflective dialogue.
that would be "bracketed" by their reactions to the texts. Each participant received for free one book every 4-6 weeks. They were asked to read the books at home and bring their reactions to the text as represented by any means of expression and communication.

Reactions to books helped the participants to contextualize their discussions and bring them closer to their realities. In reaction to *Os Bruzundangas* by Lima Barreto, for example, the issue of prejudice was raised. Lima Barreto was a victim of prejudice in Brazil. He was a man of color and poor. He found in writing a way to express his dissatisfaction with the reality he found in the country.

Alice brought closer to mind the issue of prejudice. She shared her discomfort with the prejudice against public schools in Brazil. In the opinion of Alice, the lack of quality in the public educational system should not be generalized to all schools. She and other colleagues represented a group of people who wanted to see the public schools reach a high level of quality, and they have been working hard to transform the bad images these schools have within the country.

Participants were able to apply a text like *Os Bruzundangas*, published in 1923, into a different context, where the issue of prejudice was present.

The participants themselves started to expand the notion of "text" when they connected the book read to other types of
"texts". They started bringing songs, pictures, and objects that were representative of their reactions to the books.

As participants became more confident with the notion of reacting organically to texts, they started to pay attention to the multiple forms of texts that surrounded them. Books served as stimuli for the discovery of other forms of texts.

**No Judgment**

The participants needed to feel that all they wanted to share or say would be received by the other members of the group with respect. At the very beginning of Encounter 1 the participants of *(Con)*texto heard from me that there was only one important rule in that group: there was no judgment to what people said.

I created this rule to make sure that the participants would feel free to express themselves without the fear of feeling judged or criticized by the other colleagues. For Dora and the other participants this single rule was of great importance. Dora said, "This was very important to me. Even with difficulty I was able to express myself. Since I am sure there is no judgment, I speak." As she explained later, "it doesn't mean that we do whatever we want to do." This rule is a guarantee the participants found that their ideas and feelings will be heard, not necessarily agreed with, but respected without judgment. In other words, this rule created a safe place for free expression.
Learning within Diversity and Difference

A defining factor in the ongoing development of (Con)texto was how it came to terms with the range of backgrounds and characteristics represented within our group. Placing together a group of people with different backgrounds was a major question I had when deciding on the formation of the group. However, I trusted (Con)texto could form a microcosm of the mixture of Brazilian culture. The results of the group would not have been the same if I had composed a homogeneous group.

The differences among (Con)texto participants were complementary to each other. Group members were responsible for creating a space to learn from oppositions and conflicts. A need to learn from each other's experience was created in the group. The mixture of people helped the participants, according to Gaia, "to grow, to be more and better." Together, all participants became true readers of the world, applying the texts into their daily contexts. The reading and composition of the world in (Con)texto became more inclusive of a broad range of human experiences.

The experience in (Con)texto helped Alice to come to the conclusion that the different levels of letramento in the group, represented by the diversity of life experiences and formal school training, helped to foster the acquisition of knowledge among the participants. Learning in (Con)texto occurred out of oppositions and a mixed source of life backgrounds. This acquisition of knowledge was a result, in
Alice's opinion, of the socialization of readings in the group, "Every time we did something and heard the opinions of each other, sometimes agreeing, sometimes disagreeing, and looking for explanations, this was the enrichment of our encounters."

The mixture of people in (Con)texto tried to portray the mixture of people found in Brazil. The socialization of knowledge that Alice referred to was a result of the relational dynamic that was created with (Con)texto, and somehow it was similar to the type of relationships found in the Brazilian relational universe.

Photographing and Freezing Participants' Voices

These were interventions I used to help the participants to reflect upon their own speech. Since all sessions of (Con)texto were videotaped, I had the opportunity to watch the tapes after each encounter. On some occasions I decided to "photograph" someone's voice by transcribing his or her speech onto paper and making it available for the group to reflect upon the text. The first reaction to the "photo" was, "Did I say all this?" In other occasions I invited the participants to "freeze the scene" to help them to analyze their own words. For example, Dora found it difficult to understand the books she read, but the group helped her to make her understanding clearer. After talking about her reading difficulties, I asked Dora to freeze the scene to recall what she had just said: "I read the book, found it to be difficult, then I came to the group and heard many..."
different opinions. After that I read the book again and my understanding of the book has improved." This intervention helped her to visualize the steps which she herself created to improve her reading comprehension. Not wasting the opportunity, I asked the group what the next step should be for Dora. Alice answered: "Write." Putting her ideas onto paper and presenting her personal reaction to it will help Dora to understand better the text she read.

These interventions also helped the participants to reflect upon their own speech and give it some kind of representation through writing, painting, drawing, and others. In the example presented above, writing and talk were the chosen means of communication and expression.

Sharing during Coffee with Letters (Café com Letras)

Every opportunity which (Con)texto offered was used in order to make it a continuous learning experience. "Coffee with Letters" was not only a coffee break. For about 30 minutes of every encounter, we sat around a table, drank coffee, fruit juice, ate cake and biscuits. At the same time, someone was sharing a book she read and would like to recommend, or an essay in a magazine, a poem, etc. This was a moment created for participants to share whatever they found important for others to know.

This "break" helped the participants to get to know each other through what they chose to share. It helped them to become more familiar with one another. The food itself was a
shared responsibility, as the participants took turns in bringing something to eat every Saturday.

In (Con)texto, participants appreciated the time that was devoted to reading and writing. They wished that moments like those were created at their schools and homes.

Searching for a Prompt to Write

The participants of (Con)texto had the opportunity to dialogue with two composers about their processes of composition. From the sculptor they learned how a painful personal experience can be transformed into a piece of art. From the musician they learned that writing sometimes needs a little push from someone to get started. Exposing the group to different kinds of composition processes helped them to visualize the shapes a composition can take. As Dora said, "We can write with symbols, pictures or letters."

Like the sculptor, many writers started to write when prompted by personal problems. Agatha Christie, as presented by Gaia, was an example of a writer who faced much pain in her life and was able to transform tragedy into suspense. After understanding where writers find their stories, Dora said, "Finally I think I am going to start to write."

In Summary

The "no judgment" rule of (Con)texto was an important contribution to valuing and accepting group members as they are. Because they were built at a personal level, the experiences of (Con)texto fostered cooperation and mutual
support of the participants. The expression of feelings was welcomed and present during the 16 Saturday encounters of the group throughout the 9 months.

The absence of judgment was not enough to create a space for the participants of (Con)texto to express their ideas, feelings and thoughts. They also learned to listen to what people say carefully. The communication among (Con)texto participants during the encounters praised honesty, openness and sincerity.

The participants of (Con)texto assisted me in the planning of activities and assumed leadership in developing several of them. As an involved researcher I tried to make sure that all activities and Projeto (Con)texto in itself, were of complete benefit to the participants, and at the same time served as fieldwork research for my doctoral dissertation.

Participants felt encouraged to plan the development of (Con)texto to meet their diverse personal and professional needs. As they became more confident as learners, they started to share their knowledge in their personal and professional settings, providing support for other people.

The impact and implications of (Con)texto can not be confined to the 9-month fieldwork experience presented in this dissertation. As said before, the group continued to meet for 6 more months, until December of 1997. This was an important period for the creation of cooperation with the different institutions represented by each member of
(Con)texto. Some of the latest implications of (Con)texto will be highlighted in a Postscript section written by Alice.
CHAPTER VIII

COMPOSING CONTEXTS FOR CULTURAL HEALING

FANTASY

I was just a child
looking for some fantasy
in the children's world of magic

I was just a child
looking for some love
from someone who was supposed to be a friend

I was just a child
developing what grown ups called trust

I was just a child
enjoying what adults called play

No play
No friendship
No trust

I became a boy
trapped in a world of silence

I became a boy
locked up within my self

I became a boy
whose voice was heard through radio waves and letters

I became a boy
distant from others to protect another self

I am a man
who now has the power to speak up to say who I am
I am a man
who fears the personal
and succeeds at the professional

I am a man
who speaks from within
to heal my other self

- F.S. Cavalcante Junior (1994)

As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, the experiences of my life have helped me to read my "inner text" and start composing my "outer (con)text". My private view of the world has been developed from my own personal experience. My culture has shaped me into the person I have become.

It has taken my 30 years of living to try to understand and interpret why people do whatever they do in their lives, and the implication of their attitudes for other people's lives. I have experienced the challenge to deal with differences among people throughout these years. The cultural conflicts I have encountered could have led me to self-rejection, hopelessness, unacceptance, hatred or overall disenfranchisement. Instead, I have turned my personal experience into a process of healing and strengthening of my self-concept to help other people.

The process of healing and strengthening one's self to deal with the resolution of cultural conflicts is what I am conceptualizing as cultural healing in this dissertation (cf. Trueba, 1993). The healing process is prompted by the engagement of the knowledge and lived experiences of each person in the process, and depends on the work they do.
together of sharing their private and subjective views of the world. The multiple cultures represented by each person participating in a process of cultural healing will serve as tools to hammer each other into a new shape, who together, will be hammering a new world (cf. McDermott & Varenne, 1995).

Cultural Healing: The Key Elements

I envision the same set of values suggested by Stringer (1993) as foundations for a liberating and enhancing approach to social activity may be applied when composing and coordinating a context for cultural healing. This set of values will be designated by the acronym DELE.

1. Democratic

When composing and coordinating a context for cultural healing it is crucial that all people have the chance to participate equally. The participation of people in the decision making process in Brazil was an important issue raised in (Con)texto by the reading of Os Bruzundangas, during Encounter 3. People's lack of voice was identified by Lima Barreto (1923) as a problem found among the Brazilians who do not seem to engage in social causes for the benefit of a larger society. There's a tendency to fight for personal interests, which will benefit oneself, one's family or a close network of friends. This was also the reading made by Lima Barreto of his own country in the early 1900s.
People in a leadership position or with more academic training tend to separate from those with less power or less training. A circle of "importants" is created to give support for each other. This small and powerful group of people dictate the interests and status of everyone else.

Participation in (Con)texto was open to all people. The encounters aimed at raising the consciousness of a social practice (in the schools, ministry of education and community) that is inclusive of all people and all forms of communication and expression.

The constitution of (Con)texto was democratic in allowing the participation of people with different professions, levels of schooling and social classes. As an "expert" or someone with more formal academic training I could have imposed my knowledge on the people. Instead, the leadership of (Con)texto was shared with the other participants, who took turns in shaping (Con)texto to meet their needs and of a larger group of people (at homes, in the schools and in the ministry of education).

The value of democracy is crucial for finding value in people. If opportunities are not provided for a humble person or for someone with little formal schooling to present what they know, these people will rarely find a space in which to show their potential.

The selection of people by the analysis of curriculum vitae is exclusive and sometimes unreal. The amount of training courses a person has does not guarantee a successful
application of someone's knowledge. When selecting people to join (Con)texto, my only criteria was to choose people from different backgrounds and life experiences.

People need space and time to show what they know. Human beings feel the need to have what they know validated by other people. As Pingo, the only adolescent of (Con)texto said, "I feel valued here." People need to feel valued. The experience of (Con)texto proves that if you are able to create a context where someone's knowledge will be validated without judgment, this practice will be transformative and enriching for all participants.

2. Equitable

One of the basic premises of (Con)texto was the equality of each participant. We started from the basic premise that independent of their social class, age or level of schooling, they all had knowledge and experiences worth sharing. Sharing in (Con)texto took place within a heterogeneous group.

The mixture of people found in (Con)texto was similar to the communities from Brazil. According to DaMatta (1987), Brazilian community is "heterogeneous, unequal, relational and inclusive." In the United States, by contrast, the community is "homogeneous, egalitarian, individualist and exclusive" (p. 315). The tendency in Brazil when forming a community of people is not to respect the heterogeneous characteristic of its people. Like in the United States, the idea of community is founded on the homogeneity of all its...
members, who are considered to be individuals or citizens. Those who are not considered to be "the same" will be excluded. This might explain the proliferation in the United States of homogeneous communities such as Union of Latin American students, Alliance of Gay Men, and many others.

In Brazil, however, the idea of community is heterogeneous, and not based on individuals or citizens, but on the relationships each person has with families, group of relatives or friends. Personal ties will be the main driving force making a community function in Brazil.

Before conceptualizing (Con)texto I had chosen to study the relational universe of Brazil. With the idea that Brazilian culture is composed by a mixture of people, I opted to create a group of people the main characteristic of which would be a mixture of professions, social backgrounds, ages, experiences and schooling. In Brazil, like in the United States, people normally choose to compose a group by taking into consideration its homogeneous characteristics (age, profession, level of schooling and social class). I trusted what my studies of the relational universe showed me, that in Brazil communities are formed by a mixture of people.

The value of equality presented here implies that, in a mixed group of people, each person has the same equality of worth, and not, as the name might suggest, that everyone in a group is equal. The experience in (Con)texto invited each participant to learn from differences and find value in each other.
3. Liberating

Providing freedom from oppressive conditions was an important contribution to the participants of (Con)texto. Starting in Encounter 1, the single rule of "no judgment" helped the participants to free themselves from oppressive forces that blocked their whole self-expression.

"No judgment" was the key found by some people to open doors for the emergence of dormant potentials. The approach used in (Con)texto that welcomed multiple forms of communication and expression facilitated the opening of new potentials and their validation.

A student who wrote poetry found out that his means of expression was as valued as someone who paints. The multiple forms of communication and expression had the same worth. A person who felt debilitated for not being able to write essays discovered that the sculpture, her preferred way of representing her feelings and readings of the world, had as much value as someone else's representation.

The value of liberation allowed the participants to free themselves and gain more voice. Unfortunately, in the case of Esperança, her new voice became threatening to her husband, who instead of encouraging the development of Esperança, a "woman with voice" as she called herself, decided to prohibit her participation in (Con)texto. Esperança was becoming a reader and composer of the world. At every encounter, she wrote a letter to share with the participants her multiple
readings of her personal experiences. In each letter she disclosed a little from her private life, starting from her own childhood. She had reached the point of writing about her own adulthood before marriage. If she was following a progressive development of her own life, the next phase would be her current marriage life. Esperança's life, as she once said in (Con)texto, was an open book. All her letters brought to (Con)texto were shared with her husband. He might have felt insecure about his marriage, and knowing Esperança was about to start writing about that phase of her life, decided to block her voice again. Esperança had to leave (Con)texto.

In the closing party of (Con)texto the group wanted Esperança to participate since she had been with us for most of the encounters. Ákila was nominated to invite her personally since they are close friends. Esperança talked to her husband who agreed she could attend the party if he came along. Esperança's husband came to the party. He stayed quiet and serious, simply observing what the group talked about. Esperança had lost the spontaneity she used to share with us in the previous encounters. I believe she felt there was someone watching over her shoulders.

Esperança in Portuguese means "hope". I gave her this pseudonym on purpose, in the hope that women in Northeast Brazil will become "women with voice" who will free themselves from oppressive relationships. The feminist movement has been active in Northeast Brazil for about a decade now, but much more needs to be done, men and women
together, to transform the "machist" society in Brazil's Northeast.

4. Enhancing

The mixture of people and the multiple forms of communication and expression, had a major impact on the participants of (Con)texto. The context of (Con)texto was created to enable the expression of people's full human potential.

The differences found in (Con)texto were enriching for each participant. As expressed by Maria in Encounter 7, the reactions to the group activities would not have been so good if all participants had the same level of knowledge. In Gaia's opinion, in the same encounter, the diversity found in (Con)texto brought harmony to the group.

Ákila is an example of a person whose personal growth was evident in (Con)texto. As she shared in Encounter 6, (Con)texto helped her to lose the fear of expressing her own opinions, freeing her from a shyness that blocked her self-expression. Throughout the encounters, Ákila became more and more participative.

The enhancing component of the (Con)texto approach is due to the fact that a context was created for the expression of people's full potential, where participants would be free to express their ideas, talents and feelings without judgment. In (Con)texto there was not one right way of doing things. The dual model of "right" and "wrong" evaluation was
not applied in (Con)texto. Instead, any potential that emerged was perceived as being of importance to the person who was expressing it. By being able to reveal completely who they were and what they knew, participants of (Con)texto felt transformed as people, feeling they had more value, were more independent, had more solidarity with each other, and were more committed to other people than when they first joined the group.

Looking at all coins together: How much is it?

The implications of this study can not be measured with the same precision as a coin value. The main coins of this study, my basic premises that guided me throughout this work - The Brazilian Relational Universe, The Notion of Literacies and The Concept of Culture - are priceless. They, together, are worth the transformation of people.

This dissertation began years before I decided to engage in this study. It started with my own need to understand my culture. I thought the relationships of people in my country were far more complex than the simple model of "two Brazils," in which the rich people had access to private institutions and privileged positions, and the poor people had access to bad quality services in public institutions and limited positions in society. I always believed, and the examples in my society proved to me, that poor people, with the help of a mediator could navigate socially. The study of the relational universe of Brazil helped me to see that in this society,
mediators play important roles in determining people's opportunities.

I am grateful for the framework created by Roberto DaMatta for studying Brazilian culture. Hess and DaMatta (1995) warned us, "the age of Brazilianists is over" (p. 3). Brazilianists are foreign researchers who design a framework to study Brazilian culture most often imposing their own cultural values and assumptions onto the culture studied. Hess and DaMatta reinforced this view, saying, "Brazilians are developing their own frameworks for analyzing their own practices and institutions" (p. 3).

I accepted the challenge of creating Projeto (Con)texto in order to understand how a group of people construes and conveys meaning in a certain cultural context. My biggest challenge was the constitution of the group. If I had followed the North American notion of community, I would have selected people with homogeneous characteristics. Instead, I followed my intuition that the more diverse the group, the more representative of Brazilian mixture of people it would be. (Con)texto was composed of rich and poor people with several levels of schooling, ages varying from 14 to 50 years old.

I also believed that people used multiple forms of representation to convey their ideas, feelings and thoughts. I could not have asked the participants of (Con)texto to express themselves in writing only. I invited them to choose from what they found pleasure in doing. More importantly,
they were assured that whatever they chose to share would be received by the rest of the group without judgment. Conceptualized in broader terms, this notion of literacies as the ability to construe and convey meaning in a certain cultural context through multiple forms of communication and expression, created a universe of possibilities in the group.

The next important phase of the group was to understand why they do what they do. For some of the participants of (Con)texto expressing themselves in public was a major fear. Alice, as she presents in the postscript session of this dissertation, did not have the courage to write or speak her opinions before joining (Con)texto. Her active participation in the group helped Alice to understand why she had become fearful of speaking. She, as many others, became a product of their oppressive culture, which blocked the development of themselves as people with voice.

Projeto (Con)texto was a game of coins. They were flipped constantly as the situation demanded. Sometimes only one coin was thrown by the participants at the center of the table; sometimes two; and many times all together. Each coin carried a different voice, a different experience remembered.

As a context for cultural healing, (Con)texto created the opportunity for the participants to bring to a level of awareness why they do what they do in their lives. Bringing their actions to a level of awareness was the beginning of transformation for several of the participants of the group. This is what I have called a process of healing and
strengthening of one's self. It empowers people to deal with cultural conflicts.

Alice, whose voice is representative of many other voices in (Con)texto, wrote in the postscript session of this dissertation how she was educated in school to respond to the teachers with the answers they wanted to hear. Neither her opinion, nor her own reactions to the books she was requested to read, had any importance in the classroom. Only the "single" and "right" answer was accepted. Like Alice, many other people in Brazilian society are products of an oppressive education.

When I told the participants of (Con)texto that within that group there was no judgment, I could read in their faces that they were questioning how the context of that group could be so different from the context outside the group, which had shaped the persons they had become.

The process I have envisioned of creating contexts without judgment to raise cultural awareness of the participants is an extension of the ideas of Paulo Freire (1970), George and Louise Spindler (1989, 1994), Trueba (1993) and McDermott and Varenne (1995). The region in Brazil where Projeto (Con)texto was developed was the same region where Paulo Freire was born and did most of his seminal work in promoting the conscientização of the oppressed people.

In this study, I have distanced myself from the dualistic framework used by Freire of either oppressor or oppressor and have adopted the relational framework of
DaMatta (1982, 1987, 1991, 1995) of creating a context where both oppressor and oppressed interact and learn from and with each other.

In (Con)texto participants were invited to understand why they do what they do in their lives by bringing to a level of awareness their own cultural and personal historical conditions. This awareness leads to liberation from experiences of oppression and dominance.

The process of composing (Con)texto with people from different social classes, levels of schooling and different life backgrounds is similar to the process of cultural therapy envisioned by the Spindlers of bringing together people in power positions and minority or disadvantaged people.

However, the intervention of bringing to a level of awareness why participants did what they did in their lives - the main purpose of cultural healing as conceptualized by Trueba (1993) - was not enough to sustain the awareness of participants of (Con)texto. They needed to become authors of the process of transforming awareness into action. For this transition to happen, they needed to take from inside of them the tools they already had with them to express and communicate their ideas, feelings and thoughts. As contrasted with their experiences in school, they were not told which tool to use and how to use it. They were asked to find a tool that gave them pleasure and use it to construe and convey new meaning in the group. The approach of letramento I have
developed with the participants of (Con)texto to encourage their communication and expression by using the tools they already had, becomes an addition to the processes presented before of promoting conscientização.

In (Con)texto, participants shared the tools they brought from inside of them, the ones that have always existed but didn't find a space to express themselves. Many of these tools had once been devalued and forced to be hidden. At these moments, the poet, for example, that has always existed in one person finds the space to express her poems aloud, receiving validation from the other members of the group, whose tears dropping from the eyes share the emotion of someone who finds for the first time a place where she can express herself without judgment. Sitting across from the poet, an artist discovers that his painting has the same value as the written text of his colleague. He remembers the many times he asked his teachers at school if he could represent his understanding of the book in painting, but always heard, "no, you have to write." In this new context, receiving permission to paint his thoughts, is a moment of healing for this person who was never allowed to be his whole self.

Cultural healing, as I have conceptualized it, is a representation of life in culture (cf. McDermott and Varenne 1995), where people share together their multiple tools of reading and composing the world. The representation of the world in which people live is polyform and multiliterate.
Compared to what many of them learned in school, there are multiple forms of representing the world (polyform) and many tools (multiple literacies) available to choose from. The process of cultural healing will be a product of learning to read and compose the world, using multiple tools shared in the group, that will give a new shape to each person involved in the process.

The notion of life in culture presented above emphasizes that there is not only one way of "being literate" (ser letrado) in a certain cultural context. To be literate is to be able to use the multiple tools available to read and compose the world and to learn to give the same value to the multiple forms of representation of our responses to the world.

"Everybody Has Something to Say": Some Final Comments

I feel the data are sufficient to illustrate the impact of (Con)texto in people's lives. To be part of (Con)texto was an experience of nourishing and being nourished by the multiple views of a heterogeneous group of people, who engaged themselves in the process of personal and social transformation.

On one occasion Alice told me, "(Con)texto was unique because it believes everybody has something to say and that this something is important." The approach developed in (Con)texto helped participants to free themselves to discover they had something to say that was worth sharing. Initially they trusted me as a facilitator, who guaranteed he or she
would not be judged by others in the group. Progressively, the group itself learned to apply the single "no judgment" rule.

In Encounter 1 Dora presented herself as the key that open doors. I will borrow Dora's key to name it the "no judgment" key that opens doors for people to search for themselves in a safe place. "In (Con)texto," Alice said, "we feel free to dare new paths." In the search of the new paths, participants encountered their own potentials which was represented by the multiple forms of communication and expression that best suited each person. The discovery of one potential led the person to another one. Someone who thought she was only able to write, also discovered she could communicate through drawing and through music.

As noted in Encounter 13, the action is "contagious". The discovery of one person served as a stimulus for another to search for his own potential, respecting her own pace. Let me conclude by presenting some advice for the creation of contexts for cultural healing.

First, compose a group of people which is as diverse as possible. After the conclusion of fieldwork for this dissertation I have composed several other groups. These groups, that have been called Oficina de Letramento (Workshop of Letramento) are formed by diverse groups of people, from different social classes, levels of schooling and ages. A more recent one was formed by people from the ages of 13 to 65 with different backgrounds and life experiences. The
groups meet for 8 weeks for 4 hours each time (32 hours total). The single rule is that in those groups people have the permission to let their whole selves and potentials emerge - there is no judgment. The representation of what they feel and think can be made through the use of multiple forms of communication and expression. They can choose from what gives them more pleasure. Some people choose painting, others choose collage and the list of possibilities is endless. Diversity, multiple forms of representation and no judgment have been key elements to the success of the various groups Alice and I have been coordinating.

Since the completion of Projeto (Con)texto, over 90 people have attended our Oficinas de Letramento from August of 1997 to February of 1998. These workshops have been promoted by a large newspaper company in the city of Fortaleza, which has created a department of letramento within its administrative structure that I have been managing since July of 1997. As of the same date I invited Alice to join the department of letramento of the newspaper as a part-time job (she continues to teach in the public school in the mornings and evenings). She and I have been conducting workshops for diverse groups of people throughout the whole state of Ceará. As of the completion of this dissertation, the workshops of letramento are being contracted with the newspaper company by several ministries of education from towns in the state to become part of their teachers development programs. Alice is now teaching ministries of
education, supervisors and school coordinators. In a hierarchical structure of a ministry of education, a public school teacher, and someone without a university degree, would never be given the opportunity to teach her superiors. The newspaper company has created a new channel of social navigation for Alice and for myself. Alice's dream of seeing public schools making use of letramento (as written in postscript session of this dissertation) is happening sooner than she expected. She is now organizing herself to write a book. She has bought a computer and a printer.

Second, be an involved facilitator. Take part in the activities you and the group proposes. Your coordination must ensure that all people in the group will have the chance to participate if they feel like doing it. Gently, encourage the participation of those who feel more reluctant to participate. However, respect each person's time and pace. If a person prefers to listen only, respect her need. She will find the right time to express herself.

Third, as of the first meeting, present the single rule of the group. There will be no judgment in the group. Everyone should feel free to express everything they think or feel. The group shall learn to respect and deal with differences.

Fourth, as much as possible, present to the group multiple forms of communication and expression. You should start by proposing activities with music, writing, drawing, sculpting, performance and others forms of representation.
Use the same multiple forms of representation as stimuli for discussion. Search for the local cultural forms of communication and expression in the community where you are working. Respect and value what is popular and vernacular. Invite suggestions and propositions from the group.

Fifth, encourage the participants to take the knowledge from the group to their work or family environments. Motivate them to explore multiple ways of seeing their world and interpreting their cultural conflicts.

In the foregoing chapters, I attempted to produce an anthropological narrative that ceded ground to the voices of the people. According to Howard-Malverde (1997),

>a commitment to such dialogue is surely imperative if the ethnographic enterprise is to be meaningful in the postcolonial worlds, and will bring about gradual and radical changes in the aims, objectives, and methods of anthropology in the years to come. (pp.9-10)

I hope that the readers will feel, as I do, that in today's society there is a greater need for creating contexts where people will be able to express their full human potential. The inclusive experience of (Con)texto reminded me, and I hope the reader will to, that the overspecialization of modern society is leaving out people of great potential who are not able to show what they know because they don't have a diploma or formal schooling.

This dissertation is an invitation for other educational researchers to extend the nature and outcomes of their work
to benefit the people who served him or her. As noted by Stringer (1993), the socially responsive educational research is "a practical exercise in the sociology of knowledge, challenging researchers to actively engage the many worlds of meaning that are a concomitant part of every social, cultural, and educational setting" (p. 160). Within this framework of research, the analysis of the events lies in the micro-picture of a local setting, such as what was generated by (Con)texto.

The postmodern genre of research writing "attempts to derive theoretical insights from ongoing participation in social life to make those insights directly applicable" (Stringer, 1993, p. 160). As a young researcher, I share my optimism that social inquiries will not only serve to grant degrees or promotions, but will firstly, contribute to social change.
Monday, 26 January 1998. It has been for almost a month that I am trying to write about my experiences as a learner and multiplier of letramento. Even though I will put onto paper my lived experiences and the ones I am still living, I don't think my writing will ever convey my true "organic reactions" to the experiences in (Con)texto. Why? Because I would need to be an excellent writer to make of these words I am now writing, a true picture of a reality I lived. In other words, my words could never have the same impact as if I were speaking personally to the people who will have the opportunity to read these pages. I would not know how to describe with precision the reactions produced by my being (body and spirit), in the same way I shared my readings of the world and my multiple texts in (Con)texto. But the truth is that two years ago I would not find the courage to write

"Come on, let's go/To wait is not to know/Those who know make the time/They don't wait for things to happen."
(and even speak) about what I think. I was afraid of "making mistakes."

At school, we had to give the answers our teachers wanted. Only their answers were correct. We ought to have the same reactions and opinions about the books they required us to read. We filled out reading lists with tons of questions about the authors of the books, about the characters, what the authors wanted to say at a certain section of the book (poor us if the answer was not the same as the teacher wanted!). We did not have the right to have our own readings of what we read. At each "wrong answer", how many voices were shut down, repressed? And as a consequence, how many writers, sculptors, painters, poets, musicians, did not have a chance to exist? I know a few who dare to resist and fought against the stigma of "fearing making mistakes" or against the "phantom of school failure" so that they were not shut down, and consequently did not lose the opportunity of becoming readers and composers of the world.

I had the opportunity to express my own opinions when I started to attend Projeto (Con)texto. I really did not know what I would find there. I became curious, because I have the thirst for knowing and learning. When I realized that the group was formed by people with different levels of schooling, i.e., some people with university degrees, others with high school degrees (I am included here since I am still taking the university course) and one of the participants who is still attending middle school, I thought I would only
listen to those who knew more than I did. Certainly the fear of "making mistakes" would dominate me. I tried to imagine how Pingo, the middle school student was feeling. However, at each encounter, we discovered that besides our different "levels of letramento", we all shared with each other our readings of the world, our knowledge, our reaction to books, paintings, sculptures, songs, and we even reacted to our own reactions. There was only one single rule in the group that I believe everyone found to be crucial: "No Judgment." Starting with this rule we were able to construe a relationship of respect to the knowledge of each one and learned from and taught each other. We learned to listen to the other. We had the freedom to compose our organic reactions using any of the multiple forms of communication and expression we wanted, i.e., through music, arts, writing, speech, dance, collage, poetry, cordel, the one that best suited our needs. This strategy helped us to discover and value our creative potential. Through letramento, I discovered something very important that my school did not know how to motivate me to: Why read? and Why write?

But (Con)texto was not only letting me discover the pleasure of reading and writing. I was not the same person anymore. I realized I could also transform my classroom to a space where my students, like me, could discover the pleasure of reading and writing. I created a small "literate universe" in my classroom, with books, newspapers, magazines, maps, letters of the alphabet, wall dictionary, boards with
Language Arts and Math contents, articles, games, etc. I started to use literature and composition every day in class. I respected the multiple forms of representation of my students, and also gave them the freedom to choose what they wanted to read or the books they wanted me to read to them. I learned to have critical consciousness about the context we lived in, motivating me to become part of the process of transforming this context. I learned the true exercise of citizenship.

We experienced for one and a half years in (Con)texto the birth of a new approach to reading and writing. It was different from the ones we found in the schools. It did not discriminate or separate knowledge. It allowed us, through a democratic approach, to socialize our knowledge, helping us to become readers and composers of the world. At the end, we had become multipliers of letramento. For me it was a big challenge and a big responsibility. But I felt I needed to share this new knowledge. I wanted other people, like me, to discover their own "self", and help them to feel like conscious citizens who are aware of their importance in the construction of a more just and equalitarian society.

Seven months ago I accepted the invitation of my dear master Cavalcante Junior to teach workshops of letramento. It was time to face one more challenge. I had to bury all my remaining fears of "making mistakes." I was no longer just a learner of letramento. I now had the responsibility of coordinating and motivating other people to discover the
importance of sharing their readings and compositions, the importance of sharing what they knew. In each workshop of letramento taught (alone or teaming with Cavalcante Junior) I saw in the eyes, gestures and compositions of some of the participants, some of the sensations I had also experienced in (Con)texto. I was now seeing myself through them. Many times I was covered with emotion when listening to their reactions and sharing of their compositions. I found in the workshops the same respect and validation of knowledge I had encountered in (Con)texto, and also the importance of the single rule of no judgment. At the end of each workshop, we felt the need to continue sharing our new compositions and reactions so that we didn't let die the moments when we felt equal to each other.

I know I still have a lot to learn. Each new workshop I teach serves as an important space of learning. I hope to see, in a short future, all our public schools making use of letramento to awake in the students the pleasure of reading and writing. I will do all I can to contribute to this happening in our schools, because I believe in letramento as one of the tools to construe conscious citizens.

To conclude, I would like to reinforce my commitment to master Cavalcante Junior: Wherever letramento goes, I'll go with it. It is now part of me.
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