

MEANINGS OF UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE FOR STUDENTS OVER 40 YEARS OLD

Graziele Aline Zonta¹<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7908-7043>

Andréa Vieira Zanella³<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8949-0605>

ABSTRACT. Brazilian universities have an increasingly diverse student population. These include adult students who enter higher education not directly after finishing high school but years later, standing out older than their classmates. Their living conditions and the possibilities of permanence at these institutions differ from those of younger students, a situation that requires investment in studies on this specific group. In this direction, this article analyzes the meanings of the entry process, the challenges faced in the relationship with colleagues, and how undergraduate students over 40 years old experience teaching and learning practices at the university. The statements of three students over 40 years old who participated in a research intervention methodologically outlined in reading and writing workshops were submitted to a discourse analysis based on Bakhtin's dialogical theory. In their speeches, the students reported how they have faced the tensions involved in the university discursive field, highlighting the conflicts with younger colleagues, the appropriation of new information technologies and the learning provided by participation in the academic-university environment.

Keywords: Adult undergraduate students; higher education; reading and writing workshops.

SENTIDOS DA VIVÊNCIA UNIVERSITÁRIA PARA ESTUDANTES COM MAIS DE 40 ANOS

RESUMO. As universidades brasileiras contam com um público de estudantes cada vez mais diversificado. Dentre eles, constam estudantes adultos(as) que ingressaram no ensino superior anos após a conclusão do ensino médio, destacando-se por serem mais velhos do que seus colegas de curso. Suas condições de vida e as possibilidades de permanência nessas instituições diferem daquelas de estudantes mais jovens, situação que exige o investimento em estudos sobre esse grupo específico. Nessa direção, este artigo analisa os sentidos sobre o processo de ingresso; sobre os desafios enfrentados no relacionamento com colegas; e sobre como estudantes que ingressaram na graduação após os 40 anos de idade vivenciam as práticas de ensinar e aprender na universidade. Os depoimentos de três estudantes desse grupo, que participaram de uma pesquisa-intervenção metodologicamente organizada no formato de oficinas de leitura e escrita, foram submetidos a uma análise de discurso de orientação bakhtiniana. Eles(as) relataram como realizam o enfrentamento das tensões que envolvem a inserção no

¹ Universidade Federal do Paraná (UFPR), Curitiba-PR, Brazil.

² E-mail:gzonta@hotmail.com

³ Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), Florianópolis-SC, Brazil.



campo discursivo universitário, dando destaque a embates no relacionamento com colegas mais jovens, à apropriação das novas tecnologias de informação e aos aprendizados propiciados pela participação no cotidiano acadêmico-universitário.

Palavras-chave: Adultos(as) universitários(as); ensino superior; oficinas de leitura e escrita.

SENTIDOS DE LA VIVENCIA UNIVERSITARIA PARA ESTUDIANTES COM MÁS DE 40 AÑOS

RESUMEN. Las universidades brasileñas cuentan actualmente con un público de estudiantes cada vez más diverso. Entre estos, se destacan los estudiantes adultos que ingresaron en la enseñanza superior mucho después de la conclusión de la secundaria, destacándose como los más viejos que sus compañeros de curso. Sus condiciones de vida y las posibilidades de permanencia en esas instituciones difieren de aquellas de estudiantes más jóvenes, situación que requiere más la inversión en estudios. Ante esto, el presente artículo analiza los sentidos del proceso de ingreso a la universidad de los estudiantes de más de 40 años de edad, así como los desafíos enfrentados con colegas y cómo vivencian las prácticas de enseñar y aprender en la universidad. Se sometieron a un análisis de discurso bakhtiniano los relatos de tres estudiantes con más de 40 años, que participaron de una investigación-acción metodológicamente organizada en el formato de talleres de lectura y escritura. En sus declaraciones, los estudiantes relataron cómo enfrentan las tensiones que devienen de la inserción en el campo discursivo universitario, destacándose los embates en la relación con colegas más jóvenes, la apropiación de las nuevas tecnologías de información y los aprendizajes propiciados por la participación en el cotidiano académico y universitario.

Palabras clave: Adultos universitarios; enseñanza superior; talleres de lectura y escritura.

Introduction

Incessant search,
From the child's place.
I didn't know that a limiting day,
To the trust place-form.
Still incessant search.
I will not be a passerby.
I have no hurry.
I will stay at all angles
Of your printed letter.
(Ana Maria)

With the changes observed in the student body of Brazilian Federal Institutions of Higher Education (Instituições Federais de Ensino Superior [IFES]), resulting from the access and permanence policies that occurred in the recent history of the country (Bisinoto, Marinho & Almeida, 2011; Cerutti-Rizzatti & Dellagnelo, 2016), studies that seek to understand the cultural, social and economic differences of these new groups have been amplified. However, much of this research is oriented towards the conditions of young university students, those who generally go directly from high school to higher

education, in early adulthood. They problematize the transition between these levels of education, the pace of studies, adaptation to institutional practices and new ways of relating, the development of professional identity, entry into the world of work, the strategies used by young people to face these issues, among other points (Carlotto, Teixeira & Dias, 2015; Machado, Zonta & Zanella, 2016; Santos, Polydoro, Scortegagna, & Linden, 2013).

Howbeit, the new access possibilities via the National High School Exam (Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio [ENEM]), Unified Selection System (Sistema de Seleção Unificada [SISU]) and vacancy reservations⁴ (Reserva de Vagas) have also opened the doors of Brazilian universities to another public that previously had restricted conditions of participation in these institutions: adult students, who enter higher education not directly after finishing high school but years later, standing out older than their classmates.

Information from the National Forum of Community and Student Affairs Deans (Fórum Nacional de Pró-Reitores de Assuntos Comunitários e Estudantis [FONAPRACE], 2011) indicates that, although most of the student body in Brazilian IFES is composed of students aged between 20 and 25 years, currently we have a portion of approximately 10% of students over 30 years old. The living conditions of older students usually differ from those of young university students: they are generally away from studies for an extended period, have broader relational and family experiences, established careers, greater financial responsibilities. Such conditions lead university practices to impact differently on them and, consequently, demand other coping methods, which are not always contemplated in studies about this issue and oriented towards young people.

This article analyzes the meanings of the entry process, the challenges faced in the relationship with colleagues, and how undergraduate students over 40 years old experience teaching and learning practices at the university. We chose to select these students because they spontaneously addressed, throughout the research, the impacts that the age difference among them and their younger colleagues had on their university experiences, a condition did not mention by their less-than-40-years-old-colleagues, who participated in the research field.

The information used for the study was produced from reading and writing workshops carried out with undergraduate students at the Santa Catarina Federal University (Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina [UFSC]) in 2016. The workshops were part of this article's first author's doctoral research procedures under the guidance of the second author⁵. Designed in the research intervention methodological format (Zanella, 2017), the work sought to create a field of collective transformation and problematization of meanings, relying on the researcher's intervention in the area as a condition for knowledge production. This intervention was characterized as a mediation guided by the demands of *researching with*, a condition that involves the inquiry into the circumstances of the dialogic research scene that affect both the researcher and her interlocutors (Jobim and Souza & Carvalho, 2016).

The workshops aimed to work on reading and writing in different text genres to problematize academic literacy practices and the students' experiences at the university.

⁴For information on ways to access higher education in Brazil, see: National High School Exam (ENEM) (Ordinance No. 468, 2017); Vacancy Reservations for admission to Federal Education Institutions (Law No. 12.711, 2012); Unified Selection System (SISU) (Ordinance No. 21, 2012).

⁵ Approval for the research by the Ethics Committee for Research with Human Beings at UFSC (CEPSH) can be consulted on Plataforma Brasil under protocol CAAE 53681516.2.000.0121.

Seven meetings of two hours a week were held with the group, and at each session, themes that encompassed the daily life of university practices were discussed. Some of them were: meanings about entering university; places of voice and silence in knowledge production; academic writing; literary writing; production of seminars; institutional texts; writing on social networks. The number of participants varied between four and nine throughout the meetings.

The workshops were offered in the format of a university extension course open to students from any undergraduate course. The group received students from different courses, stages, and ages with no other selection criteria. Students from the Letters, Pedagogy, Law, Geography, Psychology and Physics courses participated. Three participants were aged between 18 and 25; one was between 30 and 35, and three were over 40. A psychologist from the Dean of Student Affairs (Pró-Reitoria de Assuntos Estudantis [PRAE/UFSC]), a partner unit of the workshops, also participated as a mediator along with the researcher.

The theoretical-methodological orientation chosen for the study was the philosophy of language perspective of Mikhail Bakhtin. He elaborated dialogues among the worlds of life, art and science, as they occur through the written word (Bakhtin & Voloshinov 1976). This perspective was considered relevant for the elaboration of the workshops and the development of the analyzes as it provides the basis for the creation of activities capable of articulating the life experiences of each participant with their university experiences, with the mediation of the aesthetic-literary material used for the discussions at each meeting.

As a procedure for the discussions, conversation circles were also carried out based on the Bakhtinian language perspective. These circles invest in and aim to promote the circulation of the word, the appreciation of the realities of each student and the recognition of oneself in the relationship with others (Branco & Pan, 2016). In this theoretical-methodological orientation, the group space is constituted as a dialogical arena of voices in tension (Bakhtin, 2013; Holquist, 2017; Molon, 2016) which, in turn, substantiates and expresses the conditions of the broader discursive field of the academic university space. The social voices that circulate in this field make themselves heard with greater or lesser strength, defining enunciation conditions for different ways of evaluating the world, that is, for different axiological positions (Bakhtin, 2012; Faraco, 2017).

By forming a diverse group of students, the workshops made it possible to open space for different positions, for listening to sometimes silenced voices, such as the voices of older students who, having a reduced presence in the academic context and being farther from the study practices than their young colleagues, they do not always find equal listening conditions compared to other students.

The participants' speeches⁶ during the circles were recorded on a recorder, transcribed and selected to dialogue with the texts they wrote during the activities of the workshops. This material composed the corpus of Bakhtinian orientation discursive analysis presented here (Jobim and Souza & Carvalho, 2016; Sobral & Giacomelli, 2016), which, when listening to students over 40 years of age, listened attentively to the dialog which connotes relationships in the university context.

⁶We chose to refer to the men and women who participated in the study as "the participants", using the female gender as a reference to the "participating people".

Entering and belonging: meanings of being a university student

Ana Maria, STR and KBSSA⁷ were the three participants aged over 40 in the group.

Ana Maria, a female, attended Letters and was 41 years old in the workshops. As she reports, by mistake when applying for the entrance exam, she enrolled in the French-Letters course, having later changed to the qualification in Spanish. After this graduation course, she returned to take the habilitation in Portuguese-Letters, which she was in at the workshops. She greatly valued her studies and was keenly interested in literature, believing that she could get to know their authors by reading the texts, "in a text, you see a person's X-ray". She said that she wanted to "fill herself with as much knowledge as possible", a motivation that led her to seek the workshops.

STR, a female, was 45 years old, working in the administrative sector of a public school. She joined the Letters course at UFSC after having completed a distance education in Pedagogy. During the workshops, she frequently reported the challenges she faced when performing academic activities, especially concerning the interpretation and production of texts, associating such difficulties with the fact that she was not close to her colleagues' age and came from a public school.

KBSSA, a male, was a 49-year-old Psychology student. The constant travel required by his professional career led him to conclude his high school via correspondence. Before entering UFSC, he had already started the Pedagogy course and changed from that to the Mathematics course due to the intention of helping his son. The latter was having difficulties in the subjects that required mathematical knowledge in the Engineering course he attended. He had to abandon this graduation because of his work demands. Later, he entered the Psychology course and, when transferred from the city again for work reasons, he also moved to UFSC to continue it.

The first reading and writing activity of the workshops was carried out in the group's second meeting. The participants were invited to read an excerpt from the novel *"This Side of Paradise"* by F. Scott Fitzgerald (2013). In the narrative, contextualized in the United States of the early 20th century, the young protagonist, fresh out of preparatory school, recounts his impressions upon arriving at Princeton University. This story about a young man with few responsibilities and experiences in the adult world stirred the conversation about the place occupied by students of different ages in the university world.

In the following excerpts, Ana Maria, STR and KBSSA comment on the challenges faced in their life trajectories until entering higher education.

Ana Maria (41): I have had no support for studying ever. I don't say this dramatizing at all because it has strengthened my will to search. Since high school, my father had no patience to see my grades because teachers made endless class councils. So, he didn't have the patience to listen to everyone and then talk to the teacher to hear what she had to say about me. (...) I didn't take an entrance examination preparatory course... I just took the entrance examination (vestibular)... And I didn't pass at the first time... I came to Floripa (Florianopolis, capital of Santa Catarina State) ... Then, I asked myself a lot. I put pressure on myself, "I have to pass"... "I have to pass; I have to pass!" And I fail!... Then I realized, with the time-distance [from high school to higher education], the pressure I put on myself... In the second entrance examination, I passed. (...) I had conquered, do you

⁷When signing the Informed Consent Term (ICF), the participants could choose to have their names revealed in the analysis or not, being offered the possibility of choosing a pseudonym or having only their initials revealed. The option of the participants was respected in the article.

know? I struggled so much... Because I always liked to study. The study has been the most significant path for me...

STR (45): I am 45 years old. When she [a fellow member of the group] spoke about students who are 17, 18 years old and are in the university, just out from high school, I felt exactly the same about this. Sometimes I even cried at home, but anything would make me stop studying and finish the federal university, which was my dream. I always had to work, pay rent. I tried various entrance exams and didn't pass. I had to do a remote private course. One post-graduation at a distance. I couldn't get through the entrance exams, although it was my greatest aspiration. Then the teachers [from the school where I work] laughed at me because I decided to take the entrance exam, the ENEM. "STR, why are you going to study? You're already 45 years old and passed public service exams!" "Not! No problem, I'm taking the test, okay, principal?". And criticizing: "why to study at all?". I took the ENEM; I took the entrance examination, asked for quotas, asked for everything. I even asked all the gods! Then, I got to the entrance exam; I'm the oldest. What happened? I am the oldest. Even they look at me like I'm their mother. I am old enough to be the mother of those students. I had some setbacks [already in the Letters course] because I haven't participated in the study groups; I asked the teacher to do my work alone. I did my task alone. Because I already have another maturity. But that won't let me down to study. I have difficulty with texts, I have problems with interpretation, but I keep going. Because if I've been through so many things... I arrived at university at that age! I had to work on two, three jobs, from Monday to Monday, in the season... I didn't have an outstanding school. I obtained the regency course with a high school certificate, studied in a public school.

KBSSA (49): What I found interesting in Psychology is that the course is like this: "Look, let's understand people's subjectivity". But I think it doesn't understand people's subjectivity. Because I'm older, I sometimes have a way of being that is like this... And people don't know how to work with me. So, you arrive in a classroom... All these problems you are reporting will be present in all courses. There are people there, other people here... Then, in the beginning, there was a childhood subject. Wow, I have three children: the oldest is 26, another 24, another 18. Then I said to myself, "Wow, I'll add something!" Then, the classmates, "Wow! Here comes this guy talking about his kids!"

From the time that elapsed between high school and higher education, we recognize a period of experiences that required the responsibilities of the adult world to be placed before the desire to continue studying. Amidst fellow students, there is a clash among worlds formed in different time-spaces. Older people are people who faced and have faced the difficulties of being children, fathers/mothers and perhaps grandparents at the same time; they are workers whose views of the world, although in constant transformation, were constituted in historical moments and conditions with significant differences concerning what is currently presented, resulting in ways of living and evaluating everyday issues that sometimes confront the underlying logic of discussions that connote the contemporary. Their axiological positions are marked by experiences from other lives, coined in different times and spaces.

These experiences, according to echo in the participants' reports, do not always seem to be received in a welcoming way by the young undergraduate colleagues, defining contradictory contours for this place of university student so hard achieved. On the one hand, the condition of belonging to the university world seems to synthesize and elaborate on the challenges faced in previous years of life. The achievement of entering higher education appears to be meant as an accomplishment in itself; that is, being a student at a federal institution is defined as the primary purpose, superimposed over any other for

which an undergraduate degree could build paths. On the other hand, these meanings that refer to conquest are accompanied by non-belonging effects that manifest themselves in statements such as, "they look at me as if I were their mother", "why to study at all?", "people don't know how to work with me", "here comes this guy talking about his kids". These speeches seem to denote a social place of displacement in the university discursive field, making echoes of voices resound out of tune from the choir traditionally formed by and directed to young students and (re)produced by them. The mere presence in this context, as students, in a social place conceived for an age group that is that of their children, places them in the condition of strangers, of *outsiders*.

After entering the academic context, the reported achievement is accompanied by new obstacles, now associated with the relationships and practices of this context in discovery, when they find themselves in the condition of living with younger colleagues whose trajectories and life experiences are far from their own.

Indeed, difficulties are commonly experienced by people of all ages when they enter new relational contexts. However, there are some particularities in the reported situations by the participants we researched. The difficulties they face result, in general, from the distances among their conditions, expectations and what the university offers them as support for permanence in higher education.

Social support tends to be an essential basis for overcoming difficulties in university entering, as indicated in studies by Carlotto et al. (2015) and Raposo and Günther (2008). When problematizing the conditions of students over 45 years old who attend university, these authors indicate that entry into higher education is positively significant for this group of students. For them, the expansion of the social context is linked to the good acceptance in the class in which they enrolled, the ease they had to participate in study groups, and the satisfaction they felt for living with younger people.

But the testimonies of the participants in this research indicate results in another direction. On the contrary, for Ana Maria, STR and KBSSA, the generational differences and the time that distanced secondary and higher education were highlighted as aspects that hinder relationships with young colleagues, highlighting the divergence of interests, the ways of assessment and life experiences. This distance seems, for them, to make it challenging to build highly valued social support and, consequently, their inclusion in groups and the coexistence with younger people in the university context.

The virtual world and the technological challenges of the new discursive field

If for university students, the appropriation of the academic discursive field often takes place through laborious obstacles, mainly because it requires learning new forms of language, genres and literacy practices (Almeida & Pan, 2017; Alves & Moura, 2016; Fiad, 2011; Fuza, 2017), for older students, the challenge faced may be even more significant. As part of this new field, teaching and learning processes involve new and complex information and communication technologies that mediate literacy practices at the university. These technologies are transformed at high speed and impose an equally accelerated pace on work activities and daily relationships, changing the ways of living and being with others.

According to Lustosa, Guarinello, Berberian, Massi, and Silva (2016, p. 1016), virtual media constitutes a new area of reading and writing that enables and demands more up-to-date ways of accessing information, reading and writing, and new cognitive processes. It is the named area of *digital literacy*, which requires the ability to construct meanings from texts that present words, images and sounds on the same surface. Such a

condition requires the reader to be able to locate, select and evaluate electronically available information.

Even though there are variations in access to certain technologies due to socioeconomic issues, young people appropriate these technologies continuously, even before arriving at the university. (Cerutti-Rizzatti&Dellagnelo, 2016). Cell phones and computers with multiple functions and applications, social networks and sound, text and image production, and editing are mediating tools for their relationships and daily activities. Having learned the ways to operate such technologies in broader social contexts, they are also easily applied at the university, favoring access not only to social communication networks, to digital platforms used by Higher Education Institutions to organize the flow of academic activities, both administrative and didactic, as well as to online databases and articles, video sites, among others.

Unlikely the new generations of subjects who have broad access to the latest generation of technological consumer goods (Cerutti-Rizzatti&Dellagnelo, 2016), a large part of adult people whose youth has been lived in social contexts mediated primarily by face-to-face contacts and technologies that nowadays are considered rudimentary and even obsolete have, in general, less familiarity with the advanced information and communication technologies available. As they are unfamiliar, they operate the technological devices that involve the new forms of media-texts with more difficulty. They carry with them to the university experiences with teaching and learning practices from times when such technologies were not yet conceived, which seem undervalued in these times when the speed of production, processing, dissemination and information appropriation shall prevail.

In this scenario, the necessary exchanges with colleagues to carry out academic activities represent an additional barrier. In the following speech, STR exemplifies this point with a situation in which she tried to hold a meeting with her classmates to organize an academic work:

STR (45): I made an appointment with some people there in the library. They were like that, 17, 18 and 19 [years old], and I was 45. Nobody communicated with each other. Everyone was typing: "Let's discuss, guys?" Not! They keyed in bye, bye. And we present [the work]. And there were some flaws... Because the class asked a question, and we didn't know how to answer. And I worried that we had to dialogue...

Cerutti-Rizzatti and Dellagnelo (2016) argue that the comprehensive access to cell phones and computers that operate with high-speed networks and materialize as consumer goods in the current era of human activity has been demanding an acceleration of the selective attention of its users. This means that the time spent focusing and maintaining attention on stimuli of interest has been reduced. Therefore, it reduces the "auscultation of the other" (p. 69), whether this other is the content of a text or the person with whom one speaks. Therefore, the time of immersion in the studied texts for their understanding to occur, or even the time given to those who address us in a context of dialogue, become increasingly shorter, competing with the technological devices that the whole time capture the attention.

Through the STR example, we can analyze how, by refusing to replace face-to-face interaction with interaction mediated by technological devices, the student was placed in a position of isolation. The insistence on maintaining a face-to-face, not virtual, dialogue among real people who met in person to achieve the common goal was not understood or accepted as a possible strategy for performing a task. The purpose of the meeting, that is,

to organize a group work that would, in turn, be presented in person to the class, was not achieved in the way that STR expected.

It is essential to clarify that we are not defending face-to-face dialogue as the only possible or the best way to carry out the work in the example cited. After all, a team of students can organize themselves in various ways, including virtual ones, to handle group activities. What is relevant for us to note is the disparity between the modes of communication prioritized by STR and that of younger colleagues, for whom the use of devices such as instant messaging applications during the performance of academic activity is naturalized. Presumed in the speech of STR, senses of impotence and exclusion are heard. She organized the meeting, invited to the discussion, insisted on face-to-face dialogue but was overcome by technological stimuli that were more captivating to younger colleagues. According to her, the academic task was in the background and the work incurred, in failures, constituting an additional concern for STR.

Also, in this discussion, a situation reported by KBSSA offers an example of how the lack of knowledge about the vocabulary of the computer field can present itself as a challenge:

KBSSA (49): I did poorly on a test because I'm not very computerized. Then, in the test, some questions came up like: "Blog is for research, or not?" I said: "No! Blog must be this gossip business." Then I did very poorly on the test.

Blogs are internet pages used for publishing varied content, allowing interaction via comments between authors and readers.⁸ As it enables constant updating of content and real-time publication monitoring, they can be a virtual instrument for social research on the production of behaviors and meanings, among others. We can infer that younger people, more active in the virtual world, readers and sometimes also maintainers of blogs, would have no doubts about the word's meaning, given their immersion in the context-specific modes of language. But for KBSSA, it is something distant, unfamiliar, demanding investment from him in the sense of getting to know these new communicative possibilities. In this case, the lack of knowledge affected him in an assessment, which brought more than content in itself as a theme for the verification of learning, a piece of reality that had not yet been appropriated.

Good meetings in the cross-generational exchange

Despite the meeting with the other in the university's arena of voices turn out to be tense, sometimes resulting in suffering and difficulties, at the same time, it can provide transformative and creative movements, opening up learning paths through the recognition of differences. In the following dialogue, KBSSA illustrates a situation that enabled him to break with an old way of thinking, a change he might not be able to make in the other social contexts in which he participates daily:

KBSSA (49): The Psychology course I think is tremendous; I like it. In the old days... Wow! I'll even say, one of these days, I was like this! From a situation of two married women... Because I didn't understand... Then I talked to a colleague, and she is very open. I asked her, "what is the sexual relationship between two women like?" She said that sometimes she wears a sex device, sometimes she doesn't... Then I was like, "Hey! If a person wants to wear sex devices, why does she not marry a man?" Then she even told me a story, "I'll explain to you..."

⁸The word Blog results from a simplification of the word *weblog*, juxtaposed from the English words *web* (internet network) and *log* (activity record). In free translation, the word is defined as "online diary" (www.significados.com.br, retrieved on May 10, 2018).

Ana Maria (41): I've already asked myself this question...

KBSSA (49): Then, all of a sudden, she'll even answer you... She said, "Look, I have a friend, and she had a husband who mistreated her very badly and for several years of marriage. And then, one fine day, she met another woman". In other words, I have been connecting in my mind the man's person and his sex apparatus, the reproducer, the penis. Did you understand? But no, the person sees it differently. There is the person of the man, and there is sexual pleasure. And for me, they were together, do you understand? Then she said, "In other words, she doesn't want the man anymore, but she wants to play, she wants to feel her pleasures". And then, I understood... I said, "ahhhh!". So, Psychology helps me understand a lot of things I didn't know.

To dialogue with KBSSA's speech, we bring a reflection by Zanella (2017), who, based on her reading of Espinoza, discusses the notion of "good meetings":

From a good meeting, we always come out different; it always produces some difference. A good meeting is an aesthetic relationship; it is the possibility of investing in the sensibilities in question and transforming them, upsetting them, reinventing them. It is the possibility of intensifying the existence force, the life power. Still, reinventing the other and self, producing another, and producing other bodies (Zanella, 2017, p. 54).

In another work, the author defines the concept of aesthetic relationship as a "sensitive relationship in which bodies affect each other and let themselves be affected by the mere possibility of the meeting and what it, unpredictably, can make possible" (Zanella, 2013, p. 43). Aesthetic relationships found and ground sensibilities "that estrange the established and recognize infinite possibilities of becoming and welcoming the differences that connote or may come to connote human existence" (p. 43-44).

By articulating the notion of good meeting with the concept of aesthetic relationship, the author draws attention to the encounters that engender constitutive movements of people in an aesthetic dimension, as they promote the opening to new possibilities of thinking, acting, feeling, being with others and existing. For KBSSA, what might seem like a small clarification on gender issues is, in fact, an essential break with a particular way of thinking, constituted in a time-space in which the problematization of these issues had no place.

Upon entering the Psychology course, KBSSA is immersed in debates on gender issues and finds dialogue partners who clarify his doubts about ways of existence different from those of the groups he used to attend. The discussion about other possibilities of being provokes the tension of preconceived notions as the only possible way to relate affectively and critically. This movement, in turn, drives the overcoming of that preconceived self in terms of a new being, as reflection and dialogue with the other are offered as an opportunity to transform his condition of being in the world and the possibilities of welcoming the differences.

KBSSA leaves this good meeting transformed. By sharing his experience in the conversation circle, besides questioning his way of thinking, he opens paths for other participants, such as Ana Maria, who claimed to have the same doubts, to do so too. Thus, the conversation circle becomes an expression of the voice arena for the singular and collective elaboration of the issue experienced in the broader context of the university and other social contexts in which they participated.

Another example of a good meeting took place in the same conversation circle. Lucas, an 18-year-old student, moved from Brasília to study Physics at UFSC. After listening to the testimonies of the older participants in the group, he assesses his relationship with the students in his course:

Lucas (18): I went from high school straight to university to live on my own, and my circle of friends changed a lot because the friends there were people of my age. And here, oddly enough, the friends I made are my parents' age. And then it was funny when I found myself in a circle of friends where I was the youngest. And in Brasília, I saw people of that age and, "ah, they are not on the same level..." And here, it was different.

Mediator: Are the people in your course older?

Lucas (18): Yes.

Ana Maria (41): But are you happy with these changes?

Lucas (18): The thing I like most in my life is change. I am delighted to be like that. This integration between older and younger people in the course is excellent. Just as we have a lot to learn from older people, younger people help older people understand the pace of what is happening in the world. We get older, and the world of the younger ones gains a faster flow, whether we like it or not. Because we get slower, it's natural in life. And when you put a young person in your circle of friends, he speeds up. Because mainly in Physics there is a lot of research, then sometimes the person is doing it, and the young person comes up with an idea and then everything flows. And then the older ones know how to develop the idea of the younger one because he has more experience. So, I think this mixture of ages, older and younger people, is significant for everything.

Ana Maria (41): Good to hear that!

After listening to the reports of suffering from his colleagues, the speech of the young student Lucas offers a counterword to the sense of worthlessness that echoed in Ana Maria, STR and KBSSA speeches. By validating the relationship among students from different generations, highlighting the importance of this exchange for constructing their knowledge, Lucas legitimizes the contribution of older people, values their presence at the university, recognizes that they "are on the same level" even though marked by significant differences. The differences, in this case, are valued, as well as the "between different" that can raise intergenerational relations to other levels.

Indeed, when we affirm the university context as an arena of voices in tension, as a space for dialogue that constitutes a condition to produce science, the collective construction among participants from different social realities, ages and cultural conditions becomes essential. Diversity is seen in its positivity, meeting among different as a condition for the emergence of aesthetic relationships and, therefore, other possibilities for everyone. Furthermore, besides collaborating with the production of academic knowledge, the presence of older students affirms the movement to transform Brazilian universities into more democratic spaces, open to the voices of the new participating groups, including those who belatedly were able to enter higher education.

Final considerations

In times of policies and practices transformation aimed at higher education, new voices start to compose the student body of Brazilian IFES, engendering studies on their conditions of entering and permanence. Adult students who enter graduation later than their colleagues, in addition to quantitatively fewer in university classrooms, present greater distance from the academic discursive field, its language forms and the mediating instruments that participate in current educational practices. This audience finds possibilities of affirmation, positioning and recognition in the university context with more difficulty, requiring the opening of voice spaces so as not to remain silenced and not see the much-desired university education denied.

The epigraph-poem that opens this article is authored by a participant, Ana Maria, who was asked to produce a text on the topic: *This side of UFSC: before entering, after entering*, Ana writes a poetry that seems to synthesize the "incessant search" she undertakes as a university student. "Limiting", "passerby", "trust", "no hurry", are expressions used in her text and whose meaning effects resonate on her relationship with the university context, recalling the meanings of so many others who have traveled paths a little longer and non-linear than their younger colleagues had taken until they arrived at the university. We hope that this work has contributed to a small opening to the expression of their axiological positions and the listening of their speeches, in what that constitutes itself as a space of such difficult achievement for those who are not such young students.

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