

REPRESENTATIONS OF SOCIAL ACTIVITIES IDENTIFIED IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL WITHIN A CONTINUING TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

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Abstract: This research aims at identifying, describing and explaining the systems of social activities of a school community and identified in the discourse of the school coordinator. The theoretical framework of this study is composed by Collaborative Research, Cultural-historical Activity Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis and Systemic Functional Linguistics. The corpus of this research is composed by two semi-structured interviews. The first quantitative analysis revealed the emergence of 16 social activities mentioned by the school coordinator. The most recurrent ones were: a) the development of extracurricular projects, b) laboratories use and c) teachers' replacement.

Keywords: representations; social activities; continuing teaching education program.

Resumo: Esta pesquisa tem como objetivo identificar, descrever e explicar os sistemas de atividades sociais de uma comunidade escolar, identificados no discurso da coordenadora da escola. Os fundamentos teóricos desse estudo são a Pesquisa

Colaborativa, a Teoria da Atividade Sócio-Histórico-Cultural, a Análise Crítica do Discurso e a Linguística Sistêmico-Funcional. O corpus dessa pesquisa é composto por duas entrevistas semiestruturadas. A primeira análise quantitativa revelou o surgimento de 16 atividades sociais mencionadas pela coordenadora escolar. As mais recorrentes foram: a) desenvolvimento de projetos extracurriculares, b) uso de laboratórios e c) substituição de professores.

Palavras-chave: representações; atividades sociais; programa de formação continuada de professores.

• INTRODUCTION

Several studies (MOTTA-ROTH, 2008; TICKS, 2004; BRUM, 2012) which focused on language, discursive practices, educational practices and continuing teacher education have been carried out under the research line “Linguagem no Contexto Social” of the Post-Graduation Program of Linguistics of the Federal University of Santa Maria (PPGL/UFSM) and the research group “Laboratório de Pesquisa e Ensino de Leitura e Redação” (GT-LABLER/UFSM). The studies in this research line aim at analyzing and interpreting the language use in specific contexts through a critical perspective.

Accordingly, the “Núcleo de Estudos Colaborativos em Contextos Escolares” (N.E.C.C.E.), associated to this research

line, develops studies which focus on educational practices, aiming at observing, explaining and intervening collaboratively in school contexts of public schools in Santa Maria and region (BAGNARA, 2015; SILVA, 2012).

More specifically, the continuing education project “Multiletramentos, interdisciplinaridade e formação colaborativa de professores de linguagem na escola” (2015), which is developed by N.E.C.C.E., aims at providing teachers an environment for reflection about classroom practices and to construct knowledge jointly, based on a collaborative research approach.

Thus, the objective of the current research, part of the umbrella project, is to identify, describe and explain the systems of social activities of a school community (teachers, coordinator, students, parents, etc.) in a public school of Santa Maria and identified in the discourse of the school pedagogical coordinator. In addition, this work intends to understand the school context in which the continuing education program is being developed.

- **Review of literature**
 - **Collaborative Research**

Collaborative research is a qualitative perspective of investigation, which offers “possibilities to provide contexts for joint construction of new knowledge by teachers who become researchers of their own teaching practice and by external researchers, during projects of continuing education conducted

in schools” [my version] (MAGALHÃES, 2002, p. 40). In the same way, collaborative research means knowledge constructed jointly and it aims to supply the needs of the school context. This process must reach all participants involved, from school members to researchers.

Collaborative research does not involve only participation and contribution among participants. Instead, it also implies tensions, conflicts and contradictions throughout this process (CELANI, 2004, p. 38). Contradictions are part of the classroom context, once they arise due to different views of the participants who do not have the same opinion. Therefore, contradictions can help the participants involved in collaborative processes to create a locus for reflection and change in their practices. As Celani (2004, p. 42) states: “it is necessary to accept the contradictions of the current classroom, determined by their unpredictability (...)” [my version] so that social actors can reflect, examine and review critically their views and beliefs about classroom practices, aiming at transforming these practices. When organized, these practices constitute particular systems of social activities. The concept of Activity System will be discussed in the next section

Activity System

The concept of Activity System or Learning Activity, proposed by Engeström (1987), is helpful in this research in order to identify, describe and explain what social activities the participants of this school community are engaged in, that is,

how the participants of this school are socially organized.

Inside a school context, the school community, which consists of teachers, researchers, students, coordinators, parents, teaching staff etc., engage in different social activities which compose a larger activity system. In this activity system, the subject relates to the object to achieve a result in the end of the activity.

According to Engeström (1987), the structure of the Activity System includes the following elements: subject, community, rules, division of labor, object, instruments and result. The subject refers to the participant who constitutes the activity. In turn, the subjects compose a broad community. The rules are those which regulate the activity, implicitly or explicitly. The division of labor guides the ways to organize the tasks developed by the subjects. The instruments are the resources that are necessary for the implementation of the activity, in other words, they mediate the interactions among the subjects. The object is what guides the activity, the reason for conducting it. At last, the result is what is achieved in the activity, the outcome of the process. Through this system, Engeström explores the elements which are interconnected in the interactions among subjects. In addition, the activity system is not isolated since one activity system may interact with others (PASSONI, 2012, p. 178).

According to Liberali (2009), social activities are actions in which participants act collectively in order to achieve a shared goal. In this sense, the social activity is created

from several mediations which only become possible through the social interaction (AGUIAR; MACHADO, 2012, p. 31). Cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) focuses on the analysis of social activities, in which “people interact with each other within cultural and historically dependent contexts” [my version] (LIBERALI, 2009, p. 12). Therefore, it is within the context of a public school that a particular subject, the school pedagogical coordinator, represents the social activities experienced by its members. In order to analyze the representations of these social activities we take into account the contributions of Critical Discourse Analysis and Systemic Functional Linguistics.

Critical Discourse Analysis and Systemic Functional Linguistics

The theoretical approaches which support this work are Critical Discourse Analysis and Systemic Functional Linguistics. According to Fairclough (2003, p. 26), a discourse is “a particular way of representing some part of the (physical, social, psychological) world”. In this sense, discourses vary as the way people represent the world also varies. In turn, discourse plays a part in representations. Fairclough (2003) states social actors produce representations of their own practices, other practices and representations of the material world in the course of their activity. These representations are materialized as texts.

Critical Discourse Analysis helps people understand the meaning of texts, creating criticism and raising consciousness about what is said, written or represented through language.

Thus, texts and interactions need to be analyzed critically in order to investigate how society works and how people relate to each other.

In this way, Critical Discourse Analysis supports this research as a resource to analyze language in the discursive level while Systemic Functional Linguistics contributes to interpret the linguistic exponents in the textual level. In other words, we intend to analyze the corpus to see how the social activities are represented by the discourse and materialized in the linguistic level by texts.

Text is “language that is functional” (HALLIDAY, 1989, p. 10). In other words, text is any piece of language, spoken or written, that is playing a function in a certain situation. Under Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective, language is related to the social structure, that is, the whole environment of a society. Since our first focus is on the attempt to understand the school context in order to map the system of social activities developed in the school; Halliday’s theory is useful in the sense that it provides a framework which helps to realize how contexts and activities function (HALLIDAY, 1989).

Accordingly, Halliday’s conceptual framework is based on “three headings”: field, tenor and mode, performed by the metafunctions “Ideational”, “Interpersonal” and “Textual”, respectively. Field refers to the happenings that are going on, actions that are taking place in a specific situation and the activities the participants are engaging in. Tenor refers to the participants of the activities, their social relations and social roles. Mode refers to the composition of the text and its function

(HALLIDAY, 1989, p. 12). As the aim of this research is to identify the activities within the school, the investigation of field is in focus.

Therefore, considering this dialogue between Critical Discourse Analysis and Systemic Functional Linguistics, this study highlights the Representational meaning (FAIRCLOUGH, 2003) to analyze discourse. From the Representational meaning, “clauses can be seen as having three main types of element: Processes, Participants, and Circumstances” (FAIRCLOUGH, 2003, p. 135).

- **Methodology**
- **Context of investigation**

The school in which the umbrella project “Multiletramentos, interdisciplinaridade e formação colaborativa de professores de linguagem na escola” (2015) was developed is located downtown, in the city of Santa Maria, and it was founded in 1946. Nowadays, the school is composed by approximately 1200 students grouped in 56 classes in three different shifts. The school staff has 145 professionals, among them, teachers and other school members.

- **Procedures of data collection**

According to Vieira-Abrahão (2006), we have many instruments to conduct an investigation that involves teaching actions and beliefs. This research is developed under a qualitative perspective. Thus, as instrument of data collection, we use semi-structured interviews in order to collect the data. As Vieira-Abrahão (2006, p. 223) states, the semi-structured interview “is an instrument which best suits the qualitative paradigm because it allows rich interactions and personal responses” [my version].

In this sense, semi-structured interviews are organized as follows: the researcher elaborates a few guiding questions in order

to conduct the interview. However, these questions are used without following a fixed order so that other unforeseen themes and topics can emerge (VIEIRA-ABRAHÃO, 2006, p. 223).

• Corpus

The corpus of this research is composed by two semi-structured interviews carried out with the school pedagogical coordinator. The first interview was audio recorded on November 30th, 2015 and it lasted eighteen minutes and eleven seconds. The second interview was audio recorded on May 10th, 2016 and it lasted seventeen minutes and fifty-five seconds.

Procedures and categories of data analysis

The first procedure of analysis was to transcribe the interviews in order to analyze them. Secondly, we identified the social activities developed within the school and highlighted by the school pedagogical coordinator in the interview. Thirdly, we investigated the recurrence of the social activities discussed by the interviewee in order to show the degree of importance of the social activities for the school pedagogical coordinator (VIEIRA-ABRAHÃO, 2006, p. 223). The second procedure of analysis was to identify the social activities developed within the school and highlighted by the school pedagogical coordinator in the interview. Thirdly, we investigated the recurrence of the social activities discussed by the interviewee in order to show the degree of importance of the social activities for the school pedagogical coordinator (VIEIRA-ABRAHÃO, 2006, p. 223).

Processes	Nuclear Participants	Circumstances
Major ones	MATERIAL	Actor Goal
	MENTAL	Senser Phenomenon
	RELATIONAL	
	Attributive	Carrier Attribute
	Identifying	Token Value
Further ones	BEHAVIOURAL	Behaver
	EXISTENTIAL	Existent
	VERBAL	Sayer

Table 1 – Types of Participants, Processes and Circumstances.

Processes

• **Results and discussion**

The main objective of this study was to identify, describe and explain the social activities experienced by the school community. Since the corpus of this research is composed by two interviews carried out with the pedagogical coordinator of the school, we identified the social activities experienced by the school community, but through the school coordinator's point of view. An activity system includes the subject, the community, the rules, the division of labor, the object, the instruments and the result, as described in the review of literature. The first quantitative analysis highlighted the emergence of 16 social activities in the school coordinator's discourse. The most recurrent ones, emphasized by the school coordinator, were: a) the development of extracurricular projects, b) laboratories use and c) teachers' replacement, (Table 2).

Social activities	Occurrence	Percentage
1. Development of extracurricular projects	9	16,08 %
2. Laboratories use	7	12,50 %
3. Teachers' replacement	6	10,72 %

Table 2 – Recurrence of social activities.

This work will focus on the analysis of these first three activities, presented in Table 1, exploring how they are organized as activity sys-

tems (ENGESTRÖM, 1987). We decided to analyze only the three most recurrent activities due to our limitations of time and space.

• Development of extracurricular projects

This social activity was entitled “development of extracurricular projects” since the school’s coordinator states there are several projects being developed in the school (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Development of extracurricular projects. Initial image adapted from Engeström (1987)

A - ...

Samples from the corpus			
Excerpt #1	Nós	Temos	os projetos de redação.
	Participant:	Process:	Participant:
	Carrier	Relational attributive	Attribute
Excerpt #2	(...) [A escola]	Tem	projetos do PIBID sim (...)
	Participant:	Process:	Participant:
	Carrier	Relational attributive	Attribute
Excerpt #3	[A escola]	Tem	o projeto de dança (...)
	Participant:	Process:	Participant:
	Carrier	Relational attributive	Attribute
Excerpt #4	Então, [a escola]	tem	vários projetos sendo desenvolvidos.
	Participant:	Process:	Participant:
	Carrier	Relational attributive	Attribute

- **Laboratories use**

The social activity “laboratories use” was the second most recurrent activity because the school coordinator mentions the school has some laboratories, which are pedagogical resources available for teachers and students (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Laboratories use. Initial image adapted from Engeström (1987)

Similarly to the previous social activity, the school coordinator demonstrates the school provides different types of laboratories, using the attributive relational process. Another relevant aspect the school coordinator points out during the interview is the recurrence in which the teachers use the laboratories. Although she emphasizes the recurrence of use, we do not know how these laboratories are used, that is, what activities are developed in these laboratories and how these activities complement the students’ education (excerpts 5, 6 and 7).

Excerpt #5	Nós	Temos	dois <i>laboratórios</i> de informática.
	Participant: Carrier	Process: Relational attributive	Participant: Attribute
Excerpt #6	Nós	Temos	<i>um</i> [laboratório], que <i>aquele</i> que tu pode levar, que são os <i>móveis</i> .
	Participant: Carrier	Process: Relational attributive	Participant: Attribute
Excerpt #7	[E] nós	Temos	um, que é o <i>laboratório</i> mesmo.
	Participant: Carrier	Process: Relational attributive	Participant: Attribute

In excerpt 8, the school coordinator states the teachers in the school use the laboratories, by means of the material process “utilizam”. The use of this material process indicates the action of using in which the teachers are involved. In addition, the school coordinator mentions the word “bastante”, which is a circumstance of manner, expressing the frequency in which the teachers use the laboratories. Moreover, to show how recurrent this use is, she specifies that there is a scheduling to use the laboratories; one rule of this social activity (excerpt 9). Again, there is no focus on how the activities carried out in the laboratories complement the students’ education.

Excerpt #8	Eles [os professores]	utilizam	bastante	[os laboratórios].
	Participant: Actor	Process: Material	Circumstance: Manner	Participant: Goal
Excerpt #9	Tanto é que	tem	um caderno de agendamento.	
	Textual element	Process: Existencial	Participant: Existent	

• Teachers’ replacement

This social activity was named “teacher’s replacement” and it

deals with the practice of replacing teachers, mostly when they get sick. The school coordinator reveals that some teachers enter medical leave and consequently, they need to be replaced by other teachers (Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Teachers’ replacement. Initial image adapted from Engeström (1987)

As reported by the school pedagogical coordinator, the school itself does not get involved with the teacher’s replacement. The institution responsible for the teacher’s replacement in the school is the Government Education Office Institution, called in Portuguese “8º Coordenadoria de Educação”. According to the information retrieved from the Secretaria da Educação do Rio Grande do Sul’s website, “each coordination institution is responsible for policies related to their regions, aiming at coordinating, orientating and supervising schools, offering administrative and pedagogical support for the viability of the office’s policies” [my version]. In excerpt 10, the school coordinator states:

Excerpt #10	<i>A substituição de professores</i>	não cabe	a nós.
	Participant: Attribute	Process: Relational attributive	Participant: Carrier

She construes this statement by using a relational attributive accompanied by the adverb “não” to withdraw the replacement responsibility from the school.

In relation to the process of replacement, the school coordinator explains that, in cases of medical certificates up to 30 days, teachers do not need to make up the classes (excerpt 11). On the other hand, for the process of replacement to happen, teachers need to enter a medical leave of 60 days or more (excerpt 12).

Excerpt #11	(...) se é um laudo de 30 dias,	a nossa mantenedora [oitava coordenadoria]	não manda	professor	pra substituir.
	Circumstance: Contingency	Participant: Actor	Process: Material	Participant: Goal	Process: Material

Excerpt #12	(...) se é um laudo de 60 dias,	a coordenadoria	automaticamente	manda	um professor	pra substituir.
	Circumstance: Contingency	Participant: Actor	Circumstance: Manner	Process: Material	Participant: Goal	Process: Material

In excerpts 11 and 12, the school coordinator uses material processes to refer to the action of replacement itself. In these cases, the “coordenadoria” is the actor responsible for this replacement and the “professor” is the goal, that is, the one being assigned to do the replacement. Besides, the school coordinator uses the same circumstance of contingency in both excerpts (11 and 12), expressing the conditions for the teachers’ replacement.

At last, when asked about what the students do when they do not have teachers of certain subjects, the school coordinator explains they do not attend the classes which they do not have teachers (excerpt 13). More specifically, the school coordinator uses an euphemism, which is a figure of speech, materialized in the circumstance “de período vago”, that minimizes the effect of absence of teachers in the school:

Excerpt #13	Neste período,	eles [os alunos]	ficam	de período vago.
	Circumstance: Contingency	Participant: Carrier	Process: Relational attributive	Circumstance: Manner

Therefore, the delay to replace the teachers in medical leave affects negatively the students because they cannot have classes in the school while there are not teachers available for replacement. Besides, the school depends completely on the intervention of the “8º Coordenadoria” for longer replacements. In other words, the school does not have autonomy to replace the teachers in the moment of need.

A research about teachers’ absences in the municipal school system of the city of São Paulo, carried out by Santos (2006), revealed some procedures which are adopted when teachers’ absences occur in schools. The use of other teachers to do the replacement, the advance of classes and dismissal of students earlier and the permanence of students in school without class are some strategies mentioned by Santos (2006). The last practice mentioned by Santos (2006) is the situation presented by the school pedagogical coordinator in her discourse. Santos (2006, p. 95) argues that “this practice ensures that students complete the entire school schedule, however, it does not seem to contribute pedagogically to the students” [my version] because the students are in the school, but they do not get involved in activities which complement their education.

• **Final considerations**

Considering the overall social activities that the school pedagogical coordinator explores in the interview, we notice that, in her discourse, there is a great focus on administrative concerns. In this sense, Fairclough (2003) argues that when analyzing texts from a Representational perspective, we can examine “which elements of events are included in the representation of those events and which are excluded, and which of the elements that are included are given the greatest prominence or salience” (FAIRCLOUGH, 2003, p. 136). Thus, throughout the interview, we observe the school co-

ordinator excludes somehow the pedagogical matters, giving greatest prominence to the administrative ones. She may give more emphasis on administrative issues due to the several attributions she assumes in this area within the school.

The school pedagogical coordinators' function is to organize the pedagogical work in the school, supervise the teachers' pedagogical planning, arrange the pedagogical meetings and develop the school curriculum. Besides all these pedagogical attributions, the school coordinator seems to assume activities which are more directed to the school management, as she states during the interview. Among all these attributions, she gives more salience in her discourse on management activities because she is always dealing with the demanding problems in the school, which may close the school, if not solved. These attributions are related to school infrastructure (excerpts 5, 6 and 7), lack of teachers (excerpts 10, 11 and 12), etc. Thus, these problems and conflicts in the school are so urgent that the school coordinator, a person who should be engaged in pedagogical aspects, ends up using her time with the school financial, infrastructural and personnel management.

Therefore, throughout the interview, we conclude that the school pedagogical coordinator does not mention the importance of these activities for the students' pedagogical development. Even when she discusses pedagogical activities, such as the "development of extra-curricular projects" and "laboratories use" she does not explore in her discourse their contribution for the students' improvement. She only mentions these activities without analyzing their pedagogical relevance.

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