



The history of adult literacy in teaching, research and extension at UFU and UFMG (1986-2019)¹

A história da alfabetização de adultos no ensino, na pesquisa e na extensão da UFU e da UFMG (1986-2019)

La historia de la alfabetización de adultos en la enseñanza, la investigación y la extensión en UFU y UFMG (1986-2019).

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ABSTRACT

In a country historically marked by high illiteracy rates - currently with 11,3 million illiterates - it is possible to verify through theoretical research, as well with professionals from educational field, that EJA has a peripheral place in public policies, activities, academic productions, especially with regard to youth and adult literacy. In this paper, we propose a reflection about the history of adult literacy, based on projects developed in the field of teaching, research and extension at UFU and UFMG, since the 1980s. The tripod of public universities are teaching, research and extension activities. Thematic and reflecting about the importance of extension projects in universities is the objective of this paper. Extension activities are not always valued in academic circles, as well as the education of young people and adults. In this paper two researchers seek to narrate the history lived in the academic field of adult literacy, as for UFMG, initially a research project was created, coordinated by

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professors of the Faculty of Letters, whose objective was to understand the process of acquisition of reading and writing in illiterate adults. The project was expanded over the years as an extension project, teaching and research of post-graduate students of the Education and Language line of the Graduate Program of FaE/UFMG. Reflecting about the long duration of this Project helps us to understand the place of universities in the educational process and in the social commitment that the academy should have with the less favored layers and in the socialization of the production of academic knowledge. As for UFU, the process was inverse to that of UFMG, because in this university the youth and adult education appears initially and in a timid way in an extension project, with one isolated course focused in students with psychosocial problems, that has been working for last 15 years. This experience has been consolidated not only in extension, but also in the fields of research on the history of literacy in EJA under the PPGED / FACED / UFU lines, as well as in the financial improvement courses of SEB / MEC and SECADI / MEC from of 2009.

Keywords: EJA. History of adult literacy. Extension projects. Universities.

RESUMO

Em um país, historicamente marcado pelos altos índices de analfabetismo – atualmente com 11,3 milhões de analfabetos – é possível constatar, por meio das pesquisas teóricas, como também nos profissionais da área da educação, que a EJA possui um lugar periférico nas políticas públicas, nas atividades, nas produções acadêmicas, principalmente no que diz respeito à alfabetização de jovens e adultos. Neste artigo, propomos uma reflexão sobre a história de alfabetização de adultos, a partir de Projetos desenvolvidos no campo do ensino, da pesquisa, e da extensão desenvolvidos em duas instituições federais, a Universidade Federal de Uberlândia (UFU) e a Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), desde a década de 80. O tripé das Universidades públicas são as atividades de ensino, pesquisa e extensão. Portanto, tematizar e refletir sobre a importância de projetos de extensão nas Universidades é o objetivo deste artigo. Nem sempre as atividades extensionistas são valorizadas nos meios acadêmicos e o mesmo ocorre quando se trata da educação de jovens e adultos. Neste artigo, duas pesquisadoras buscam narrar suas histórias de projetos de pesquisa e extensão vivenciadas no campo acadêmico da alfabetização de adultos. No caso da UFMG, foi criado um projeto de pesquisa, inicialmente, coordenado por professores da Faculdade de Letras, cujo objetivo era compreender o processo de aquisição da leitura e da escrita em adultos analfabetos. A partir de 1986, o projeto foi integrado à Faculdade de Educação, ampliado ao longo dos anos como um projeto de extensão, ensino e pesquisa de pós-graduandos da linha Educação e Linguagem do Programa de Pós-Graduação da FaE/UFMG. Refletir sobre a longa duração desse Projeto ajuda-nos a entender o lugar das universidades no processo educativo e no compromisso social que a academia deve ter com as camadas menos favorecidas e na socialização da produção dos conhecimentos acadêmicos. Quanto a UFU, o processo foi inverso ao da UFMG, pois nesta universidade, a EJA aparece inicialmente e de forma tímida na extensão com cursos isolados e uma sala de alfabetização de EJA onde há mais de 15 anos atende alunos com problemas psicossociais. Essa experiência foi se consolidando não só na extensão como também um dos campos de pesquisa sobre a história da alfabetização na EJA nas linhas do PPGED/FACED/UFU, e ainda nos cursos de aperfeiçoamento financiados pela SEB/MEC e SECADI/MEC, a partir de 2009.

Palavras-chave: EJA. História de alfabetização de adultos. Projetos de extensão. Universidade.

RESUMEN

En un país históricamente marcado por altas tasas de analfabetismo -actualmente con 11,3 millones de analfabetos- es posible ver, a través de la investigación teórica, así como en los profesionales de la educación, que EJA tiene un lugar periférico en las políticas públicas, las actividades y la producción académica, especialmente en lo que respecta a la alfabetización de jóvenes y adultos. En este artículo proponemos una reflexión sobre la historia de la alfabetización de adultos, a partir de proyectos desarrollados en el campo de la enseñanza, la investigación y la extensión en dos instituciones federales, la Universidad Federal de Uberlândia (UFU) y la Universidad Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), desde los años ochenta. El trípode de las universidades públicas son las actividades de docencia, investigación y extensión. Por lo tanto, el objetivo de este artículo es discutir y reflexionar sobre la importancia de los proyectos de extensión en las universidades. Las actividades de extensión no siempre son valoradas en los círculos académicos y lo mismo ocurre cuando se trata de la educación de jóvenes y adultos. En este artículo, dos investigadores tratan de contar sus historias sobre proyectos de investigación y extensión experimentados en el campo académico de la alfabetización de adultos. En el caso de la UFMG, se creó un proyecto de investigación, inicialmente coordinado por profesores de la Facultad de Letras, cuyo objetivo era comprender el proceso de adquisición de la lectura y la escritura en adultos analfabetos. A partir de 1986, el proyecto se integró a la Facultad de Educación, ampliándose a lo largo de los años como un proyecto de extensión, enseñanza e investigación para estudiantes de postgrado de la línea de Educación y Lengua del Programa de Postgrado de FaE/UFMG. Reflexionar sobre la larga duración de este proyecto nos ayuda a entender el lugar de las universidades en el proceso educativo y en el compromiso social que la academia debe tener con las capas menos favorecidas y en la socialización de la producción de conocimiento académico. En cuanto a la UFU, el proceso fue el opuesto al de la UFMG, porque en esta universidad, la EJA aparece inicial y tímidamente en la extensión con cursos aislados y una sala de alfabetización de la EJA donde durante más de 15 años atiende a estudiantes con problemas psicosociales. Esta experiencia se consolidó no sólo en la extensión sino también en uno de los campos de investigación sobre la historia de la alfabetización en EJA en las líneas del PPGED/FACED/UFU, y también en los cursos de perfeccionamiento financiados por SEB/MEC y SECADI/MEC, a partir de 2009.

Palabras clave: EJA. Historia de alfabetización de adultos. Proyectos de extensión. Universidad.

Introduction

In this paper, we propose to analyze, from the perspective of historiography, the place or non-place that youth and adult literacy occupies in universities, especially with regard to the extension, research and teaching projects of EJA. Each of the segments cited could be cut and analyzed, however, in this text, our aim is to analyze and describe, historically, paths taken by two universities, namely: an extension project developed at UFMG and UFU, and their unfolding in EJA places or non-places in undergraduate courses, postgraduate in Education and in the Dean of Extension, Research and Teaching.

From the historiographical point of view, it could be questioned whether three decades is a relatively short time. This becomes relative when two extension projects of two institutions from Minas Gerais are taken as the object of analysis, since the commonest length of projects of extension and/or research lasts three to four years. Considering this duration, both UFMG and UFU overcame this barrier, called by researchers and scholars as “common” the completion of projects after 2 years. In the case of UFMG, the Youth and Adult Education Program (PROEF 1) started in 1986, and it is a project that made and still makes history. At UFU, the EJA project was designed to be developed in non-school venues since 2002, whose goal was to educate young people and adults with psychosocial problems. These two paths, with similarities and differences, is be the object of reflection and analysis in this paper.

Our reflections were based on our experiences in this area - our place of work and research for over 25 years - in defense of youth and adult literacy in academic environment: research, teaching and extension projects.

Thus, we decided to begin our reflections by describing the analyses of the history of youth and adult literacy: a field marked by exclusion and inclusion in Brazilian universities.

History of youth and adult literacy: a field marked by exclusion and inclusion in Brazilian universities

The history of EJA, as well as the literacy of youth and adults in Brazil, reveals the assistantialist character to those who do not master reading and writing. Literacy campaigns in Brazil are classic examples of this offer-donation bias, of something that is a right of Brazilian citizens. There is a clear inversion of values, providing the individual with an assistantialist approach and passive attitude, devoid of knowledge, values, culture, etc.

For example, it will be mentioned a fragment of a quotation from a conference of Miguel Couto, held in 1927, at the Brazilian Association of Education, on the theme: “In Brazil, there is only one national problem: the education of the people”. The title shows the problem and points out its solution; the speaker says that the problem [illiteracy], once solved, will put Brazil on the same level as the most educated nations, providing the people with revenue and honors, and safeguarding their prosperity and security. To achieve this goal, illiteracy must be definitively eliminated, because “illiteracy is the cancer that annihilates our organism, with its multiple metastases, idleness here, addiction there, besides crime”. (COUTO, 1927, p.19, *apud* MACIEL, 1994).

In the same direction, Maciel (1994) highlights the speech of former Education Minister Carlos Chiarelli, as Minister, in 1990, who, when proposing the National Literacy Plan, made the following statement:

The plan aims to give 30 million *illiterate Brazilians the right to citizenship, removing them from ignorance. (...) The government mobilizes and wants the support of the society to fight the wound, as an open source infects the consciousness of men and the nation.* (FOLHA DE SÃO PAULO, 9/11/1990, p.A4, emphasis added).

From the statements of the Minister of Education, it was not difficult to predict that the plan represented yet another doomed attempt to fail, as indeed it did. In fact, it can be said that government proposals, in general, have not had positive effects; we can claim that, although these proposals represent different political trends, they have some points in common. The first is that the illiterate citizen is always stigmatized like an "ill person", an "open wound", a "cancer", a "national shame". Just compare the above words of Minister Carlos Chiarelli in 1990 with those of Miguel Couto in 1927 (MACIEL, 1994).

The common terms associated with illiteracy and the illiterate are eradication, weeds, disease, cancer, and, consequently, assistencialist proposals to solve the serious national problem are common.

The history of youth and adult literacy in Brazil proves the indifference by the Ministers of Education towards the education of these people, even knowing that the number of young people who drop out of school is increasing, even before completing elementary school. Data from 2017² indicate that 62% of young people aged 15 to 17 have not completed elementary school; and between 2005 and 2015, the number of young people of the 'generation neither nor' - young people who neither study nor work, grew from 19% to 22%. These data and the lack of compatible and appropriate investments for the emerging public are not encouraging and lead us to believe, without wishing it to happen, that a significant contingent of these young people today will become the functional illiterate individuals of tomorrow and, again, they will be discriminated and excluded.

If EJA is for us, researchers and activists of the area, a venue of constant search in favor the illiterate young people and adults so that they have their recognition as citizens and their right to learn to read and write, such process has not been easy. It is long because it is complex, and it has been occurring gradually throughout the twentieth century. There have been many struggles by the social movements and EJA Forums, trying to reach their fullness in the Federal Constitution of 1988, when the government recognized the demand of young people and adults who did not complete their schooling through the right to regular courses. For Haddad (2007), despite this recognition that all Brazilian society would have the right to schooling, history has shown limits in the fulfillment of this right, in the context of neoliberal reforms in the following years.

In the 21st century, 50 years after the launch of Paulo Freire's National Literacy Program (1964), the data are still alarming: research shows that illiteracy among the population aged 15 and over remains stagnant. According to data from the National Survey of Household Sampling (PNAD 2019), the number of illiterate is 11,3 million, which corresponds to 6.8% of the Brazilian population. The numbers are expressive, that is, the service of the EJA continues far below than what it could be. Thus, according to Gadotti (2014), a question echoes historically: Why is the number of illiterate nowadays about the same as when Freire performed this experiment over 50 years ago? There are several reasons for this situation and, particularly, two are very visible: many leave school in a semi-illiterate condition, with little linguistic competence, and to add to this scenario, the Brazilian school, in the course of history, has not welcomed young people and adults in a coherent and fair way after they came from the literacy phase. Thus, they end up regressing to illiteracy.

² Survey conducted by the NGO "Todos pela Educação". Available in: <www.todospelaeducacao.org.br>.

Consequently, there was a continuity in the history of illiteracy in Brazil: the number of readers has not changed; the illiterate of the past had few opportunities to become citizens able to read and write short texts or letters, so common at that time.

The complexity of the world imposes increasing educational demands on workers and citizens. Therefore, it is crucial that EJA considers the importance of learners to continue learning, whether within the formal education system, taking advantage of or fighting for more opportunities to develop themselves as workers, as citizens and as human beings.

On this regard, it is important to consider what historiography has pointed out: the complete mastery of reading and writing and the social uses of these skills is one way of providing social justice to young and adults devoid of such knowledge, and it is a way of giving legitimacy to popular knowledge, and therefore, guarantee the right to schooling, access to quality education and the effective exercise of citizenship. Unsurprisingly, EJA students belonging to a marginalized educational modality³ “need to be included in relevant language use practices via the literacy project” (KLEIMAN, 2000, p. 102), whose language-centered activities have a potential to support the formation of literate subjects. According to Kleiman (1995), the rescue of citizenship, in the case of marginalized and poorly educated groups, necessarily involves the transformation of social practices that exclude them, such as those of school.

When we investigate the history of EJA in Brazil, and especially in Brazilian universities, there is no way to avoid and not register the importance of the constitution of the EJA Forums of Brazil that, when created, were intended to give visibility to the timid actions of EJA. Since its institution, the Forums have assumed an important resistance role, in the perspective that “Popular participation is an effective process of adult education, as it strengthens the awareness of the citizenship of the population, so that it assumes its role as a subject of transformation of the city” (GADOTTI, 2000, p. 92).

Initiated in the 1990's, in view of the demand and need for the preparation of the V Confinteia, and the few public policy actions in this period for EJA proposed by the Ministry of Education-MEC, this movement has now become a permanent *locus* of reflection, articulation and defense of EJA in Brazil. Understood sometimes as a social movement, sometimes as a gathering venue for discussions and political struggles for a better quality of education for young, adult and old people, the EJA Forums in Brazil are also seen as a development venue for those who work in this area of teaching. (SANTOS *et al.*, 2016, p.147-148).

In this context, the Forums in Brazil assumed a singularity that lent it a degree of reach, relevance and influence on the conduct of public policies for EJA, both at the state and federal levels. These questions still need investigations and debates in search of reflections that can help to really see what the EJA Forums are, why they came for, how they act politically in the states and their role and influence nationwide. (SANTOS *et al.*, 2016). Brazilian universities have an essential role in this process: to think, together with state and municipalities, about strategies and tactics of resistance to face the challenges of this area.

The Confinteia held in Brazil strengthened and confirmed the importance of the EJA Forums in the country, as a social movement, in the militancy for EJA for all, and with social quality, in the belief that

³ Only recently, EJA modality, which meets only 6% of the total demand for courses for young and adult students, has started to receive funding from the Fund for Maintenance and Development of Basic Education (FUNDEB).

adult education is a process that still experiences a phase of terminological and conceptual clarification and which has suffered continuous crises of legitimacy. It is very helpful that communities of nations and government representatives responsible for this education sector can meet with experts and non-governmental organizations under the aegis of UNESCO to exchange information, examine the current state of affairs and analyze the steps to determine and plan, aiming at a common future (UNESCO, 2009, p.10).

Santos *et al.* (2016), also states that,

the understanding that together we need to be and think has moved the institutions, organizations and groups that work with EJA, especially EJA Forums, and has fed discussions in the area of education of young, adult and elderly people in the country, in a process of vigilance and struggle. (SANTOS *et al.*, 2016, p. 152).

In this national movement, UFU created TRIEJA in 2007, known as the EJA Triângulo Mineiro Forum. This forum gave life to public policies and the insertion of EJA in the academy. As an example, these are actions developed by TRIEJA: 11 EJA Forums from 2007 to 2016, 1 Triângulo Mineiro EJA Forum in 2013, 1 EJA Improvement Course in Diversity - in the EAD modality (e-learning) offered in 2009, 1 Course for Production of Teaching Material and Mediators Training on Reading in 2014, 1 Specialization Course in EJA Diversity and Social Inclusion - 2 classes in Uberlândia and 1 class in Ituiutaba, 2 Specialization courses in EJA for Youth - 1 class in Uberlândia - 2 classes in Monte Carmelo, 3 Specialization courses in EJA for Youth II - 1 class in Uberlândia and 1 class in Ituiutaba, 4 Specialization courses in High School Teaching: Diversity, Inclusion and EJA - 1 class in Uberlândia and 1 class in Ituiutaba from 2014 to 2017, 2 research funded by Capes and Fapemig: Literacy and pedagogical practice of EJA teachers in the years 2010, 2012, 2013 and 2016. It is important to note that the specialization courses 1 and 2 specified above generated over 200 Course Completion Papers - TCCs - produced and presented at a collective EJA seminar.

Magda Soares (2003) also argues that the university has to join the fight against discrimination and exclusion. The university should develop reflections on what is hidden under the common sense conceptions about literacy-citizenship relationship; uncover these conceptions of their ideological content and the historical acceptance of the neglect of youth and adult literacy in Brazil:

It is incumbent upon the university, par excellence, to seek, through reflection and research, the production of knowledge that leads to literacy that, in addition to actually inserting the adult in literate culture, so that such insertion is not a passive assimilation of this culture, but it can represent new possibilities for advancing the struggle to conquer citizenship. (SOARES, 2003, p.32).

As researchers in this area, we can say that Brazil and, consequently, the universities have a republican debt to the illiterate youth and adults of our country. The 1980's was a moment marked by the strengthening of civil society, especially in the sectors committed to the popular classes. In this context, many universities have tried to

redefine the foundations that guide teaching, research and extension. The UFMG Adult Literacy project emerges, therefore, in this context of changing the role of academic extension, no longer centered on assistencialism, but rather in articulation with teaching and research, through the organization and advice of social movements that emerged.

The UFMG Youth and Adult Education Project currently called the UFMG Youth and Adult Basic Education Program, covers the three segments of Youth and Adult Education (EJA), divided into three projects: First - Youth and Adult Education Project. Second - Segment (PROEF1), Youth and Adult Education Project, and Segment (PROEF 2) the Youth and Adult High School Project (PROEMJA). These projects were created in the mid 80's of the twentieth century. Soares (2016) presents the history of the Youth and Adult Education Project - second segment - PROEF2, created in

Pedagogical Center of the Federal University of Minas Gerais as an extension project, called Supplementary Course, initially to serve the employees who worked at the University and had not completed the so-called first degree (elementary school). (SOARES, 2016, p.43).

The project for Youth and Adult Education - High School (PROEMJA) was consolidated because of the demand of the students completing elementary school to continue their studies. The three projects currently constitute the UFMG Youth and Adult Education Program, covering all segments of EJA. Since its inception, this Project at UFMG has been established with practices that are more autonomous and an interdisciplinary curriculum, and it was already distinguished from other existing supplementary courses⁴. PROEMJA came⁵ as a result of the end of schooling from the public of PROEF2, who claimed to continue their studies and, consequently, to finish high school.

A little different from previous projects (PROEF2 and PROEMJA), the beginning of PROEF1 was based on a research coordinated by professors of the College of Literature⁶. The project called Adult Literacy aimed to investigate the language skills of adults in the process of literacy during the construction of their knowledge about writing. All subjects involved in the research were university staff. From the research started in 1986, with a pilot class of eleven UFMG workers, the project was consolidated into a research, teaching and extension project, also expanding to serve the public outside UFMG. The consolidation of the research happened with the insertion of new student groups and reformulations of the initial proposal by the group of researchers and the contributions of research by linguists, sociolinguists. Since 1994, the project was integrated into the College of Education, coordinated by Professor Daniel Alvarenga⁷. Beginning in 1997, researchers at the Literacy, Reading and Writing Center (Ceale) have taken over the coordination of PROEF1, which is why the history of PROEF 1 will be the clipping of UFMG in this paper, as the dossier approach is focused on literacy.

At UFU, the “EJA in non-school venues” extension project was proposed later, in 2003. EJA was not a priority at this university: the only course that has this area as a field of knowledge is the Pedagogy course, which initially guarantees optional studies and, only in 2005, the area is awarded a compulsory 90-hour subject in its curriculum. From this teaching experience in the undergraduate degree, which did not have EJA as an internship field, the

⁴ For further study on 30 years of PROEF2, see: Soares, Leôncio, 2016.

⁵ Currently, in 2019, PROEMJA works in the Pedagogical Center facilities together with PROEF2.

⁶ Under the coordination of Professor Eunice Maria das Dores Nicolai, the research group consisted of professors Daniel Alvarenga, Maria da Graça Costa Val, Milton do Nascimento, Orlando Bianchini.

⁷ Even with the death of Prof. Daniel Alvarenga, in 1997, PROEF1 continued at FaE / UFMG.

extension project was proposed so that the students of the 4th year of the UFU Pedagogy course could know the subject of EJA in full, experience the planning, classroom practice and diversity in the broad sense of the word.

The EJA group of this extension project has its beginning in the premises of the Psychosocial Care Center - CAPS. Initially, young people and adults who were undergoing treatment participated in the project. After a semester in this physical space, we decided, together with other teachers, Pedagogy students, social worker and psychologist, that we would try the UFU Santa Monica campus, near CAPS, to see if the students would adapt to the place and whether the classes could be more interesting for these students under treatment. The experience was successful, because going to the university campus broke ties, which, could not be broken easily in the physical space for treatment. It was as if they were granted a provisional release, and each achievement was indeed celebrated by all: small achievements for us, but infinitely huge and difficult for young people and adults, who knew only one path: home-clinic, clinic- home. Students began a process of excitement and independence that began with a new path: commuting to and from campus, most often by bus or on foot.

After overcoming this challenge, it was necessary to know more about this individual, what he knew and how he learned. This, of course, was the most difficult but a rewarding challenge. Since we did not need the rigidity of traditional school, we had time to learn from them and them from us. With this experience, we found out that it requires knowledge, militancy and constant struggle to be in EJA. As young people and adults circulated around the campus and block G, location that sheltered teachers of the UFU Pedagogy course and administrative coordinations of the College of Education, there was initially a certain strangeness: who were those simple people that circulated in the corridors of this block at UFU? Gradually, students and teachers of FACED were learning to live and respect each other.

This extension project was proposed with a start and end date, as it is the case of all extension and research projects. To our surprise, however, the project works up to the present moment, endures and persists, even without financial support. The general coordination of the project would assume, together with the trainees and all volunteers, the expenses of copies and snacks. The UFU College of Education also donated consumable materials that remained from other extension projects. It may seem strange, but all the projects of EJA class were sent to different UFU public notices and none of them was approved. Professor Sônia Santos' research group embraced this class, as it was, and continues to be a source of inspiration for further research. Thus, we do not stop fighting against inequalities in our country and in academy (SANTOS, 2016).

This brief context of the UFMG Program and the UFU project allows us to reflect on the feasibility, long term and integration of research, extension and teaching projects in the field of EJA. A first point to be highlighted in this reflection concerns the concept of extension.

Reflecting on the role that extension can have to offer and how it still happens in the academic world, we consider pertinent to bring a fragment of one of Paulo Freire's work, little known: *Extension or Communication?*. This book was first published in Chile in 1969⁸ during Freire's exile there. Freire's starting point is interesting to bring to light the problems surrounding the extension works, identified in the context of the Chilean agrarian reform and in the Brazilian educational context, with reflections still present in contemporary times.

Freire (1985) starts from a semantic and linguistic discussion of the term extension, to warn us about the pitfalls we may fall into - or assume - in extensionist educational actions, as "in the term extension, the action of carrying, transferring, delivering and depositing something in someone, an indisputably mechanistic connotation"(FREIRE, 1985, p.15). Unfortunately, it is common to find extension proposals in EJA, with this conception and it is

⁸ In Brazil, in the year 1985.

even more serious when directed to the illiterate, which are consonant with the speeches of researchers, politicians and education ministers.

Freire, already in the 1980's warned us about the possibilities that extension action involves "a set of technical procedures, *which imply knowledge, which are knowledge and impose the questions*". (FREIRE, 1985, p.15, emphasis added). By assuming our social commitment, we also assume that our actions are accompanied by a stance that favors and instigates knowledge.

These are the *questions* that provide knowledge, which, in turn, only occur in the face of a *curious* attitude. Therefore, there is no transformative knowledge without curiosity. It is necessary to overcome a *naive consciousness*. (FREIRE, 1985). Like Paulo Freire, Magda Soares also often urges us to ask questions so that we can intervene, modify, change the Brazilian reality (MACIEL, 2018).

These authors help us to reflect on the extension projects, criticized by colleagues from the academy. In general, there is little understanding of what an extension project should be, considered by many to be of little scientific value. There is no dichotomy, opposition between extension projects and "academic projects". The history of this Program at UFMG and the UFU extension project proves that it is possible and desirable to articulate the tripod: teaching, research and extension. A first step in this direction is the conception of extension, which in turn guides the planning and execution of the project.

A second point for the successful action is the support of the relevant agencies in project implementation. Due to the long term that this project demands, unfortunately because there is a significant number of illiterate and poorly educated people, it is necessary to have the financial and logistical support of the University. Unlike other projects and mass education campaigns, or government programs such as Mobral, Solidarity Literacy and the Brazil Literate Program, all completed with a very small literate population, UFMG and UFU projects are long-lasting: It is no coincidence that one was started in 1986 and the other in 2002, and both are still in progress.

At UFMG, the university's support ensuring the annual scholarships for the monitor was and it is indispensable. Counting on fellows who receive scholarship annually should be a social and educational commitment to be made by all Brazilian universities. In contrast, at UFU the project has survived, for 16 years, from what is left of other large funded projects. The literacy teachers are students of the Pedagogy course who strive every year to validate the hours worked as an EJA internship.

Even with the financial support of UFMG, the efforts made to build a coherent and theoretically ground did not represent a straight and smooth path for young people and adults in the program. The constitution of the Youth and Adult Education Project, called by us the first segment - PROEF1, must be understood in a procedural and complex dimension, as the attempts to consolidate its activities were marked by moments of advances and setbacks; this constitution was determined, among other factors, by the possibilities of limit of participants involved in this path.

The possibility of having Extension Programs and Projects in the field of EJA opens an alternative for students to know and act in the classroom. Assuming that it is the function of public universities to develop and support such proposals in projects developed at both Universities, we believe that the acquisition and mastery of the mother tongue is a crucial instrument for political participation and also the fight against marginalization and prejudice against illiterate people. We agree with Soares (2003, p.79): "Teaching through the language and, above all, teaching the language are not only technical but also political tasks". Therefore, there must be a coherent political choice when choosing theories and methodologies that underlie and guide the pedagogical practice, when searching a competence

that also combats the discourses of neutrality in education, so well expressed and defended in the works of Paulo Freire.

The field of reading and writing in the history of EJA

As positioned as professors, that is also the position of learners, we look for the meaning of the experiences that constituted us as education professionals. In this search context, we are influenced by the work of Machado de Assis. Unlike Brás Cubas, a character who writes his memoirs after his death, we have the possibility of remembering in the present at the same time the dynamics of life allows us to tell, retell, and revive. Under this assumption, we turn to Magda Soares⁹, to substantiate the meaning that follows our narrative: “I look for myself in the past and I see “another person”; I cannot find what I was, I find someone I am rebuilding with the mark of the present. In the recollection, the past becomes present and it is transfigured, contaminated by here and now” (SOARES, 2001, p. 37).

The theoretical-methodological principles on literacy that guided the practices in both UFMG PROEF1 and UFU extension project, the didactic proposal was based on a dynamic process that was done and redone as it was developed. We cannot lose focus on teaching the alphabetical system, that is, the phoneme-grapheme correspondences and the orthographic system, but do so *in the context of* and *through* real social practices of reading and writing. Literacy and lettering, lettering and literacy means not dissociating the acquisition of writing technology from social reading practices. The basic idea of literacy is that literacy alone is insufficient, as the adult not only has to learn how to read, but must also learn to make use of reading and writing¹⁰.

The projects and activities for teaching and consolidating UFMG PROEF1 and UFU extension projects were and continue to be discussed, planned and organized based on diagnostic reading, writing and mathematical knowledge activities, and based on the demands brought by the monitors at UFMG, and at the UFU by the teachers of EJA with the literacy and consolidation groups. In this sense, the meetings were and they are constituted during the moments of discussion about the problems arising in the teaching-learning process, planning, evaluation and reflection of practices.

The relationship between the monitors / teachers and the coordinations begins at the moment of the selection process. Registration is open for all undergraduate courses at UFMG; at UFU, we select only students from the Pedagogy course. At UFMG, in general, subscribers of the Pedagogy course predominate. When selecting them, we seek to identify candidates with some qualities, such as commiserating with poorly educated and illiterate adults, facing difficulties as challenges, having confidence in everyone's ability to learn and teach. In a collective procedural model of training, monitors and coordinators are building their educational practice with the students of EJA.

At UFU, our experience with the students' reading and writing revealed a suffering life through their texts, marked by child labor, which made them leave school. Some had to leave their families very early, due to aggression from family or close people because of the misunderstanding of childhood problems, maltreatment, parental alcoholism, rape by close relatives, family or neighbors, and death. All this amalgam of social and psychological problems

⁹ When referring to author Magda Becker Soares, we chose to use the first and last name, ie Magda Soares. When we refer to the author Leôncio José Gomes Soares, we use only the last name Soares.

¹⁰ Magda Soares and Paulo Freire are aligned and they defend the idea that they want everyone to learn how to read and write, to master the technique consciously as a tool of transformation. This position is frequent in the authors' production, which makes it difficult to choose quotes from both to match my text, without seeming cloying and pamphletary.

coupled with discrimination have made our students even more excluded, as they have difficulty understanding the dynamics of our unfair, cruel, discriminatory and racist society.

UFMG and UFU monitors / teachers and students

Currently, few Pedagogy courses offer the formation of the Youth and Adult Educator. In most of these courses, the provision of only one EJA subject in the curriculum prevails, as UFU history tells us. Students from other graduation courses who want to know and study about EJA at universities find little room for such knowledge. The recent research by Bernardes (2016) and Lepick (2018) shows that even as an option, the subject of EJA appears in the curricula of most Brazilian universities, which reflects the neglect of policies and investments in the field of EJA and far less the knowledge of Paulo Freire's works.

Here is one of the reasons why we defend, based on the history of exclusion, the need to have disciplines with adequate academic load for the training of professionals who will work with EJA. One of the hypotheses for the little interest of the Pedagogy students, regarding the training on EJA, that end up choosing other areas of education, is directly linked to the Brazilian educational public policies.

Over the years leading the coordination of PROEF1 at UFMG and extension projects, research and teaching at UFU, it can be seen many episodes, reports and pedagogical projects developed annually. It is impossible not to bring the voices of learners in a text that proposes to reflect on the relationship between university, extension, teaching, research, from a citizenship perspective. The fact of being received and registered as students of UFMG and UFU is felt by the students as a major differential. It is common for them to say that they study at UFMG and UFU, and how proud they are to study in that place, which is true; even if they do not have to specify that they are EJA students.

They claim that it is good to go to the University, "the rooms are bright, everything works, and people treat them well, have consideration for them..." It is possible to understand why they consider the proper functioning of schools. For most of them, memories of the school past are marked by maltreatment, including physical abuse, one of the causes of school dropout when they were children. As adults, when returning to the schooling process, they face many difficulties, starting with poorly lit places, educational materials and furniture that are inappropriate for adults. We often find adults in rooms with desks and chairs for children. One of the most important aspects for learners is to feel good wherever they are. Learning involves interaction, empathy, communication and language, oral and body dialogue are very important when working with EJA. Eye to eye, handshake, smiles make all the difference in and for young and adult learning. This learning can and should be taught, learned and experienced by everyone at the University, even if, for many, it is not considered academic knowledge.

According to Fontana (2003), we become teachers through the multiplicity of experiences and relationships lived in daily life, understood as space and time of historical, social and cultural constructions. We often identify ourselves in the paths of others, because of the historical determinations of the social circumstances of which we are part. However, the way we interpret these experiences is unique, configured in the movement by which subjects reinvent sense and meanings for events experienced collectively. For Fontana (2003):

The process in which one becomes a teacher is historical; it has taught us, even without intending to. In the context of the social relations of their time, the individuals who become teachers are seizing the practical and intellectual experiences, ethical values and norms that govern the educational routine and the relations inside and outside the teaching staff. (FONTANA, 2003, p. 48).

Thus, at this movement, we are developing and appropriating theoretical and practical experiences. In 2016, two students from the 4th year of the UFU pedagogy course made a proposal to record the stories of the students of EJA in a "Book of Memories", which had, as one of its prerogatives, to learn the stories of these subjects, their perception of the world. It was also possible to follow the development of their lettering and literacy process.

We highlight here the narrative of a trainee of UFU, who reveals that, in the course of procedural and development evaluations, he used observation and rounds of conversation: "it was how EJA students evaluated us too, because we always tried to listen to them in order to understand and know what they had learned from the classes. During a process of patience and sensitive listening, we understood their proposals and needs. Therefore, we can say that the performance of this project, added to the classes in the Pedagogy course that were taught during 2016, firstly brought us not only intellectual and development contribution, but especially human, which will help not only our teaching profession, but especially in our lives as a whole. As for students, we can uniquely affirm that it was the best experience provided in and by the UFU pedagogy course" (Memories of EJA in non-school venues, 2016).

Based on this understanding, we developed our research, extension and teaching projects, considering our interest in understanding the conceptions, representations and practices of youth and adult literacy trainees and teachers - subject to these producers and recipients of culture.

Stories that are not in the speeches of politicians, rulers and far away from public policies

As this text is an attempt to be configured as a historical paper, we chose to produce narratives and testimonials, since the use of oral sources has enabled us, historians, "to delve into details of history, preventing the loss of people's memory - true agents of the historical process" (BARROS, 2004, p.48). This allows us to interpret the present based on an understanding of historical singularities of a past that is still alive; once remembering events with enriched experience over time is a possible to analyze the same situation from another point of view.

Memory is part of a dynamic process that allows us to understand the meanings that are restructuring the remembered elements, in order to reorder, preserve or delete them, feeding on memories that are sometimes vague or even contradictory, which makes it even richer. They are knowledge, sources, and raw materials of history, which task is to reconstruct the past, but they are also experiences that are lived in the intimate world, which allow relating the present with the past and, at the same time, interfere in the current process of representations.

The story of Antonio, a former student of UFMG, is common to so many other EJA students, born and raised in the countryside, who arrives in the capital pursuing the dreams of getting a good job, a decent salary, proper work registration, a formal job. Antonio gets a "good job as a school porter" ... In this job, as he told us, he entered into a crisis, and he would not stop saying, "Isn't that right? It is not right, it cannot be! How can I work in a school, see that crowd of kids studying, reading and writing and I cannot read nor write the alphabet? It is not right!" And he repeated the sentences with some indignation and outrage. It was with these feelings that he sought PROEF1.

Maria Helena says that she did not want to be hospitalized again due to the lack of reading skills. Her speech puzzled us, but it was clear when she explained that she used to work as a cleaner for a paint factory, involved with heavy cleaning of rooms, furniture, bathrooms, and she was responsible for removing paint residue from machinery and floor. She worked for many years in this job and used several cleaning products, the ones that she used to handle until the company decided to standardize product packaging. Then, the

difficulty in understanding the labels came to light. "How to identify them if the packaging and labels were all the same? The letters? I didn't know how to decipher ... I used to know the product by the packaging, each one in a way (format), drawings, colors of each one". In order not to lose her job, she started to identify the products by their aroma, trying to identify them by their smell, but she ended up intoxicated, being rushed to the emergency room. Maria Helena brings us a need to learn how to read and write as a way of preserving her life! She did not want a degree, she did not want to change jobs, to have social advancement, any of that: learning how to read and write was a way of preserving her life!

Like Maria Helena, Eliane brought her concerns about the lack of reading skills in her work. As a caregiver for the elderly, she always asked herself this question: "How to take care of elderly people, give the right medicine, at the right time, if I cannot read? I can even kill one of them if I do not give the right medicine. That cannot happen. It is their life, I love these old people; they are my life! I have a commitment to their lives. Their life is in my hands!!!" Elaine's desire to learn how to read and write was due to her responsibility for the lives of the elderly. What a citizenship lesson Eliane gives us.

Stories like those of Maria Helena, Eliane and Antônio also make us reflect on our performance and pedagogical, social and political commitment. There are lots of Antonios, Elianes, Maries who come to both UFMG and UFU to find what they have been denied for many years: their right to learn how to read and write.

In this action of listening, recording and monitoring the programs and projects, the UFMG and UFU project coordinators visited the classrooms to see the students, to talk about a specific topic or to listen to them. In one of these visits to UFMG, students of one class were all happy, and said that everything was very good now. Excited, they were showing their notebook full of writing. "Now, we are really learning," "look how the notebook is full." So I asked them how much time they were spending copying and solving the activities. I asked them to look at the notebook before having the problem of reproducing - copying - the activities, the amount they did in one day of school. I asked them to count their activities of one day having copied them and the other day without having copied on their notebooks. It did not take long before they concluded that they were "failing to learn more". "We are spending too much time, almost the entire class, copying, and too little time solving the exercises." I leave the room with a recommendation: "You, lady - that's how they address me - need to find a way to get the copy machine right away." This episode shows us how school culture, the traditional school model is imbued in the memory of our EJA students.

Helping them reflect on different situations has revealed a great deal about what they think and how collective discussions and reflections help to review positions. The following is one of these discussions that took place in the literacy group of Thuane, the monitor at UFMG, in 2016. The discussion started from a report on child labor brought by the monitor. They were immediately in favor of child labor and all arguments were supported by their life stories. Each one recalled his childhood marked by work in the fields, in construction, in family homes, washing clothes, etc. They said they worked from an early age; the work made them men and women of responsibility. Why would that be harmful if they were all there? Working at early age did not kill anyone. Then, they started building a unison speech around the defense of child labor.

The monitor let them present their arguments and at some point, she asked them 'What are the disadvantages of working during childhood?' As they were convinced of the advantages, the monitor was more incisive and asked the question: "Why are you on PROEF1?" And the answer came in chorus: "because we worked ..." The monitor's report was very interesting, detailing how they realized that childhood work was the main factor that drove them away from school. In general, they have knowledge, thoughts and answers based on practical experiences; it is important to help them advance, problematize and thus, make

progress on their reflections, knowledge and argumentation. This is what Paulo Freire calls our attention to the movement of seeking and analyzing *naive curiosity to epistemological curiosity* (FREIRE, 1998, p. 86, emphasis added).

Another interesting episode also occurred with Antonio, the school porter. He was very annoyed and said he was very angry with himself (he used this expression several times) because he could not read and write and “I saw that crowd of children knowing how to read and write” and he did not know. That was the reason that led him to PROEF1. Kildrey's student (one of the few male scholarship students), about two months later, Mr. Antonio sought the coordination of PROF at UFMG to say that he was very happy because he was spending only one pencil a week; before he spent three in just one week. Analyzing this narrative carefully - and after the shock -, there are some questions to be asked: What was Kildrey doing in the classroom? What about weekly planning discussions and meetings? When asking Mr. Antonio to explain what was going on, he quietly said that he now knew how to use the pencil. “In the beginning, I put so much force that, as soon as I began to write, the tip broke; now I am already mastering the tool”. This episode brings us to the characters Pé-de-Meia, the canvasser, and João Francisco de Oliveira, the ploughman in Vila dos Confins, by Mario Palmério:

Pen and pencil are very delicate tools. The exertion is different, heavy toil from sunrise to sunset. (...) Pé de Meia: We have already become an Eitu (a caboclo). Let us have some rest: it is still missing, Francisco, Oliveira... It is not easy, sir. It takes time. However, little by little João Francisco learns to relax his hand, finds that he does not need to push so hard, he no longer wets the paper with his sweat. (PALMÉRIO, 1974, p.63).

These and other episodes, we, researchers of EJA, take to reflect on the representations and the different places that the school occupies in the lives of our students, not only of PROEF1 and of UFU program. Just as the uses of utensils, so familiar to us, to them are like fetishes.

The learning of reading and writing occurs at each person's own pace. For some, the time is longer. We have students who have been in PROEF1 literacy class for 4 years. At UFU, we have students who have been with us for 10 years and they do not want to leave. For many of these seniors learning is long, memory is flawed. Processing information takes a lot of mental effort. And the school holiday or even an extended holiday causes a lot of anxiety in the monitors, especially the new ones. It seems that the students unlearned what they had already learned. It is always necessary to tell the monitors and the literate students that patience has to be exercised, so necessary in EJA.

Barreto (2006) states that the belief that it is necessary to learn first and then do is mistaken, because we learn by doing and reflecting on what we do. Therefore, the process of experiencing EJA teaching practices with students of the Pedagogy course is so necessary and enriching for teacher education, and the UFU project “EJA - in non-school venues” for over 12 years has provided us with such significant learning for our education.

One aspect, that has always been worked on with PROEF1 monitors, also with UFU trainees, is the relationship of dependence that students have with them, which appeals to both novice trainee and monitors, but we soon warn them to favor students' autonomy. In general, they are extremely dependent on the monitor / trainer's endorsement: “Is that right what I did?” This is what you hear most during class. They are insecure, deprived and needy people who need to be helped to become aware of how learning takes place.

Regarding the coordination work, it is important to highlight that the number of scholarship holders who were part of the history of the UFMG EJA Program is significant, since each year the Extension Dean provides the Program with 46 scholarships, distributed among three Projects - 1st segment, 2nd segment and high school. Over 33 years, we had around 1,300 UFMG students participating in the Program. Given the nature of the segment, PROEF1 has got seven scholarship holders annually and we have got 154 scholarship students. Unlike the internships that take place in undergraduate degrees, in EJA / UFMG Program they act as EJA teachers within their education¹¹. The problems, challenges, difficulties, the planning, the diagnostics, the evaluations, the lack of theoretical-methodological knowledge, everything that concerns the development of the work, are assumed by the whole group of monitors and the coordination¹².

For the vast majority of UFMG scholarship students and UFU trainees, working in these venues as a monitor or as a trainee, is the first experience with teaching, and continuing to work in the field of EJA, either as teachers, developing their masters and doctoral research, has been a path taken by some monitors of the Program in recent years. However, the experience of students in the Program and in the project is considered by most former monitors and trainees to be a learning and training on EJA, which is not present in the curriculum of the courses, such as the readings of Paulo's work, the interdisciplinary project proposals, the collective work, the stories and the learning with EJA students. This performance makes UFMG Program and UFU project a differential for professionals.

There are many facts witnessed, experienced and heard in PROEF classrooms, in training meetings by monitors and trainees: and what have we been doing over the years to coordinate these projects? At UFMG, we can say that the teaching, extension and research work is the result of many partnerships and closeness among monitors, students, coordination - we learn and make mistakes together. At UFU, our career was built based on extension and teaching, and little by little, research became necessary not only for coordination, but especially for the trainees who worked over these 12 years.

To follow the training path of our students from undergraduate to postgraduate, whether they are working on our projects, is a feedback we have, and we are most grateful when our extension students continue their academic training in the field and / or theme where we operate. Many former monitors are public school teachers at EJA, and some are already our university colleagues.

Looking back, we see that the UFMG EJA Program has become a reference in the field of literacy, in the training of UFMG educators and graduates, as a research field, thus, maintaining the ideas defended by the pioneering research professors. Besides providing young people and adults with an opportunity for schooling, the program has aroused the monitors' interest in developing their master and doctorate projects on youth and adult literacy, in addition to the desire to produce knowledge about EJA, participate in the events promoted for this area, and be inserted as EJA coordinating teachers in different educational institutions, public and private schools, all segments of education.

A little different from UFMG, a reference in the literacy field, UFU has been constituted incipiently in the field of EJA; UFU started to provide *latu sensu* post graduation courses, with emphasis on EJA since 2014.

Schooling, responsible for the literacy and broadening of repertoires of social practices in the use of written language, should be a process in which everyone needs to participate,

¹¹ In the first segment, single teaching prevails, that is, a monitor operates in all areas, in the second and third segments, scholarship holders are selected according to their education and area of knowledge.

¹² In PROEF1, there is a general coordinator, while for others - PROEF 2 and PROEMJA - the coordinators are designated according to area of knowledge.

regardless of the moment of life, social condition, gender, ethnicity to which they belong, place of residence, occupation and income. Therefore, it is essential to recognize that handling this topic in Brazil implies entering a complex political field, marked by inequality. Distinguishing the necessary reinvention of school education in order to minimize inequalities, recognizing and valuing differences and breaking dichotomies are central tasks in the field of young and adult education and the responsibility of various players, politicians and managers, including education professionals and researchers, and the subjects themselves to whom this modality of education is of right.

The History of EJA, particularly youth and adult literacy in public universities, in the field of extension, teaching and research, reveals that we still have a lot to do in the field of EJA: the right denied to illiterate people will not be tackled while society, in general, has a judgemental performance and the academy has "an exclusionary look". In a society where so many inequalities prevail and the prejudice, no matter how much it is resisted, insists on staying, we must think of education for young people and adults that enables a new way of being and standing in the world, education that is indeed addressed to these students and considers their reality.

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