

SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Crafting a neo-Vygotskian approach to adult education in Portugal: Collaborative project work in an alternative curriculum

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Collaborative project work facilitates social interactions among peers and between them and their teachers. It allows students to work in their zone of proximal development (ZPD), promoting their knowledge appropriation. It empowers adult students, allowing them to express their voices and their cultures. Inter-empowerment mechanisms are part of this process, facilitating the internalization of intra-empowerment mechanisms. Both of them shape students' life trajectories of participation (César, 2013a). This work is part of the *Interaction and Knowledge* (IK) project. During 12 years (1994/1995–2005/2006) we studied and promoted social interactions in formal educational scenarios. We assumed an interpretative paradigm and developed an action-research project (three-year alternative curriculum, 7th–9th grades) and a 10-year follow up. The participants were the seven students who completed this course, their teachers, and other educational and social agents. Data collecting instruments included observation, interviews, informal conversations, tasks inspired by projective techniques, students' protocols, and documents. Data treatment and analysis were based on a narrative content analysis. The results are mainly focused on one student: Ernesto. His legitimate participation in this course facilitated his inclusion in school and in society. It promoted his socio-cognitive and emotional development and allowed him to internalize intra-empowerment mechanisms. This enabled him to improve his life trajectory of participation.

Keywords: inclusion, alternative curriculum, collaborative project work, life trajectory of participation, inter- and intra-empowerment mechanisms

Contextualization

Since the mid-1970s Portugal has received many citizens from African countries in which Portuguese is the instruction language (PALOP). The presence of children, teenagers and adults from the PALOP has shaped learning experiences in

schools (César, 2009; César & Oliveira, 2005). Curricular and cultural differences between the countries of origin and the hosting country create the need for cultural mediation, adequate practices according to students' characteristics, interests and needs, and the use of inter-empowerment mechanisms (César, 2013a). Regulatory dynamics, particularly between the school and students' families, are also needed (César, 2013b).

The 3rd cycle of basic recurrent education with credit units (7th–9th grades) was targeted at adults and was part of the educational system (Ministério da Educação, 1991). The curriculum was organized by subject and divided into credit units. This educational system was designated as SEUC. Students worked individually on each credit unit and could request an evaluation whenever they wanted. However, this system, sustained on emancipatory theories (Freire, 1921/1985), led to school underachievement and dropouts. According to Pinto, Matos, and Rothes (1998), only 5% or fewer concluded the course within the expected time (three years). Thus, the Ministry of Education authorized the creation of curricula conceived by teachers as an alternative to SEUC (Secretaria de Estado da Educação e Inovação, 1996). Curricular innovation happened when teachers committed to inclusion, and working collaboratively, created the conditions for its fulfilment (César & Oliveira, 2005; Courela, 2007; Sebarroja, 2001; Teles, 2011).

Theoretical background

Culture, curricula, and inclusion

In Portugal, the curriculum was mono-cultural at first, as if every student participated in the mainstream culture. Those from other cultures had to adapt to the mainstream culture in order to access school achievement. Then came the multicultural curriculum, in which several cultures coexisted but with no sense of sharing and mutual recognition. In an intercultural curriculum, the sharing of knowledge and solving strategies is assumed, as is the wealth deriving from interaction among cultures (Leite, 2002). When the importance of culture in thinking and performances, in solving strategies and/or in responses was realized, the need for differentiated curricula and practices was understood. Teachers should take into account the particularities of each culture, particularly the mother tongue and the symbolic systems (César, 2009, 2013a, 2014).

In an intercultural and inclusive approach, the curriculum becomes emancipatory (Freire, 1921/1985), allowing vulnerable cultural minorities to share their own knowledge and ways of thinking, to appropriate knowledge, to develop and to mobilize abilities and competences, promoting school and social inclusion. Positioning itself as a mediational tool between school cultures and the other cultures in which students participate, the curriculum can contribute to the development of regulatory dynamics, allowing students to act as legitimate participants instead of peripheral participants (César, 2009, 2013a, 2013b; César & Oliveira, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Dialogical self, collaborative work, and project work

The theory of the dialogical self (Hermans, 2001, 2003, 2008) is a lens (or one more lens) that allows us to understand learning processes, students' access to achievement and to school and socio-professional inclusion. Hermans (2001, 2003) conceives of the self as being constituted by the *I* self, the subject who acts and thinks about his/her experiences, and the *Me* self, the object of these very experiences. Each person assumes different *I*-positions, for instance, as mother, daughter, wife, friend, professional, or student. These identity positions may be assumed successively or simultaneously, and they are more or less dominant in that space and time (César, 2013a), that is, in the architecture that characterizes a given situation. The different *I*-positions are endowed with one or more internal voices (Bakhtin, 1929/1981). According to César (2013a, 2014), voices may also be expressed externally when participants are empowered. These voices engage in dialogical interactions that are sometimes conflicting (César, 2009, 2013a; Courela & César, 2012). The voices of those who participate in cultures detached from the school culture are often silenced (César, 2009, 2013a, 2013b, 2014; César & Santos, 2006). They are the ones who also usually experience stronger conflicts between the different *I*-positions, which may cause significant suffering (César, 2009, 2013a, 2014).

Collaborative work has to do with promoting social interactions among peers and encouraging autonomy and personal responsibility, and also with the respect for the diversity of the different solving strategies and ways of reasoning (César, 2009, 2013a). In the school context and in formal educational settings, it also promotes interactions between teachers and students. It allows teachers to form dyads and/or small groups and to propose tasks that allow each student to work in his/her zone of proximal development (ZPD), facilitating knowledge appropriation and students' development (Vygotsky, 1934/1962). Peer interactions foster access to peers' reasoning and solving strategies, thus facilitating intercultural dialogue. In formal educational contexts of adults who experienced early school dropouts, collaborative work may be used as a mediational tool between cultures, facilitating knowledge appropriation and their access to school achievement.

Project work is long and phased. The authenticity of the project and its social insertion make it suitable for adult students (Badalo & César, 2007; Courela, 2007). Project work is a privileged form of promoting collaborative work (Badalo & César, 2007), so we chose to propose this way of working to the students (Courela & César, 2004, 2006, 2012). When we link project work to collaborative work, we call it *collaborative project work* (Courela, 2007). Collaborative project work must be supported by a didactic contract (Schubauer-Leoni, 1986) that allows a distribution of power among participants, especially in the way this power is used by those who have a more significant amount of it (César, 2013a; Courela, 2007): the Ministry of Education, the school, and the teachers. The didactic contract corresponds to the sometimes explicit, but more often implicit, set of rules that regulate the didactic relationship and the expectations of the different participants. It facilitates students' engagement in tasks and working in their ZPD (Vygotsky, 1934/1962). The tasks should allow each participant to assume, on an alternating basis with his/her pair, the role of more competent peer (César, 2009, 2013a). Together with

the mobilization of abilities and competences for carrying out certain tasks, this leading role promotes agency (Kumpulainen, Krokfors, Lipponen, Tissari, Hilppö, & Rajala, 2010). Students assume their voices (Bakhtin, 1929/1981; César, 2009, 2013a), particularly in their learning community, and participation becomes legitimate (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Participation and power issues

To César (2013a), who coined the constructs of *inter- and intra-empowerment mechanisms*, empowerment processes begin in the social realm (hence mechanisms of inter-empowerment are created first of all), and only then can they be internalized by the participants, that is, take the form of intra-empowerment mechanisms. Examples of inter-empowerment mechanisms are the processes of power distribution among participants. These processes are provided by the didactic contract and by the pedagogical practices, by presenting tasks open enough for members of different cultures to express themselves, and by resorting to self-regulated assessment systems (César, 2013a; Oliveira & Courela, 2013). As César (2013a) points out, to address empowerment as something more than simply external to the individual and to allow it to have a transforming power regarding attitudes, social representations (Marková, 2005), and students' access to school achievement, its mechanisms must be internalized and take the form of intra-empowerment mechanism. These last mechanisms can be inferred when we realize that there was a development of a positive general and academic self-esteem, commitment and persistence in carrying out tasks, or resistance to frustration when a solution to a problem is not quickly found (César, 2013a). These mechanisms relate to reflection, thinking, feelings, and life trajectories of participation (César, 2013a, 2013b).

The empowerment mechanisms that each individual is capable of appropriating shape his/her life trajectory of participation, another construct coined by César (2013a). This author conceives of the life trajectory of participation as being broader than the concept of life project. The construct of *life trajectory of participation* illuminates the movements that characterize an individual's trajectory in different contexts, scenarios and situations (César, 2013a). It combines two dimensions: time and space. It stresses the importance of different types of participation in different cultures, making use of their knowledge funds (Kumpulainen et al., 2010). Thus, it allows them to (re)construct their life trajectories of participation, leading to socio-professional inclusion and mobility.

Method

This study is part of the project *Interaction and Knowledge* (IK), which studied and promoted social interactions in formal educational scenarios during 12 years (1994/1995–2005/2006) (for more details see César, 2009, 2013a; Hamido & César, 2009; Ventura, 2012). We assume an interpretative paradigm (Denzin, 2002) and a historically and culturally situated approach (César, 2009, 2013a). This is an ethnographic-based research (Hamido & César, 2009), based in the existence of a design of flexible research, prolonged fieldwork, use of thick descriptions, and emergence of inductive categories of analysis.

During the course, which lasted three years (7th–9th grades), we developed an action-research project, as it was suitable for solving concrete problems, with a strong focus on intervention (Mason, 2002). After the course there was a 10-year follow up, making this a longitudinal study through which we could study and understand the impacts that those practices had (and have) on the participants' life trajectories of participation. The research questions we focused on are: (1) How does an educational community construct an inclusive and emancipatory curriculum?; and (2) How do the mechanisms of inter- and intra-empowerment, developed during this alternative curriculum, shape students' life trajectories of participation?

The participants were the seven students who completed this course, their teachers, and various elements of the educational community. We focus mainly on one student: Ernesto. The names are fictional, to guarantee anonymity. The most used data collecting instruments were: participant observation (audio- and video-recorded, as well as in photos and in researchers' diaries), interviews, informal conversations, tasks inspired by projective techniques (TIPT), students' protocols, and documents. Data collection took place throughout the course and during the follow up. Data treatment and analysis included codification. For instance, the excerpts of the interviews carried out during the course are identified by the letter I, followed by the order in which they took place (I1, I2, and so forth), by the name of that participant, and, for teachers, by the subjects they taught and the years of the course in which they participated. In the follow up interviews we also used the letter I, the interview number, follow up (*fu*), and then the name of that participant. Therefore, I2*fu*, Ernesto, refers to the interview carried out in the 2nd year of the follow up with Ernesto. In the transcripts, we use ... after a word for a small pause in the account (less than 3 seconds), and (...) for longer pauses. For purposes of data treatment and analysis we resorted to a narrative content analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998) in order to understand each participant's life trajectory of participation (César, 2013a).

Results

Construction of an inclusive, emancipatory curriculum by the educational community

The elaboration of this alternative curriculum occurred in 1999/2000. Students with repeated school underachievement in SEUC were invited to apply for the course. Candidates chose the vocational areas they were interested in. The selection of two vocational areas resulted from these choices. Thus, the students participated in the construction of this curriculum from the start, as several authors recommend (Knowles, 1986; Secretaria de Estado da Educação e Inovação, 1996; Zittoun, 2004). The teachers were invited by the school board. This was an important step to promote innovation based on teachers (Sebarroja, 2001).

The course included: (1) a general component—Portuguese, English, and Mathematics; (2) a socio-cultural component—Environmental Education, Citizenship Education, Social Sciences, Physical and Chemical World, and Hygiene, Health, and Safety at Work; and (3) a vocational component—Chemistry and Physics Lab Techniques, Biology Lab Techniques, Organization and Classification

of Techniques for Library Documents (TOCDB), and Introduction to Computer Technologies and their Application in the Lab and in the Library (ITIALB). The course was called laboratory assistant / technical librarian. It was one of a kind on a national level. It took place between 2000/2001 and 2002/2003 and provided the conclusion of the 3rd cycle of basic education (7th to 9th grades).

The innovation in the pedagogical practices was mentioned in students' accounts, as illustrated below:

Ah! Alternative curricula because they're always more practical. At least for someone who stopped studying a long time ago and is starting, I always thought it was more practical. (...) What advantage do I see? The advantage is, well, the teachers have more time. There's more attention, isn't it!? Like this... well, they've got more time for us. (I3, Tânia)

This student felt that those practices facilitated learning. She referred to the existence of practical activities, such as those carried out in collaborative project work, developed in Environmental Education (Courela, 2007).

The teachers valued that they could act as curriculum constructors, as shown in one of their accounts: "It was the first opportunity to work with a syllabus that didn't come from the Ministry of Education" (I1, Mathematics teacher, 1st and 2nd years). The collaborative work that took place among the teachers, which was facilitated by a weekly meeting, was still quite unusual in schools (Lima, 2002; Teles, 2011). This work turned out to be essential for the construction of this curriculum, contributing to the development of complex professional competences (Perrenoud, 2000).

Ernesto's life trajectory of participation

Ernesto was from São Tomé. He lived in Angola, with his mother, until the age of 17. In 1999 he came to Portugal to live with his father. In 1999/2000 he started attending SEUC. One of his teachers stated: "I remember he was always on his own and he was someone... He looked like an animal! He didn't talk... I remember walking into a classroom one day and the place was dark and Ernesto was sitting there all by himself!" (I1, ITIALB teacher, 3rd year). Ernesto was completely isolated from a social and educational point of view. Neither the school was inclusive, nor was he capable of trying this inclusion, revealing lack of confidence in the interest he might arouse in his peers. This lack of confidence has been stressed by other authors who have studied and developed alternative curricula (César, 2002; Oliveira, 2006). Thus, Ernesto had not internalized any intra-empowerment mechanisms he could use in the school context.

During the course, Ernesto's progress was noticed by the teachers, his schoolmates, and himself. One teacher highlighted: "to look at this kid now and remember the one I saw in that dark classroom, it seems like two different people! Ernesto is just so different, he's so much more communicative" (I1, ITIALB teacher, 3rd year). Another teacher added: "We got him to integrate the class quite well and even feel motivated to the point of saying he'd like to continue to study!" (I2, TOCDB teacher, 1st and 2nd years). Thus, he began internalizing and using some intra-empowerment mechanisms. This had impacts on his life trajectory of participation.

If we seek to understand the impacts of the inter-empowerment mechanisms on Ernesto ways of acting, we find them in his discourse, in the observations and interviews we carried out, during which he stressed the importance of the interpersonal relationships he established with his classmates and teachers. He highlighted the importance of collaborative project work, which he called group work. This work led him to communicate increasingly with the others. Thus, in a follow up interview, when we asked him whether he felt he was part of a group, he answered: “Yes, and I even miss the whole group, the way they treated me...” (I3fu, Ernesto). Initially, Ernesto did not seem to engage in the collaborative project work. His curiosity was clear, but he was reluctant to interact with his classmates. Several times we observed them calling for his attention, encouraging him to work, and we also acted in a similar way.

In a class that assessed one of the collaborative project works, Ernesto was questioned about his participation. Gesturing with his hands at the same time, he replied: “Because I’m not very good at assembling all those things” (videotaped class observation, March 15, 2002). As the classes went on, the time he took to start working decreased. He began to discuss procedures with his classmates, to engage in collaborative project work, and to accomplish it while interacting with the other participants. Progressively, he increased his persistence and the effort he put into the tasks (see Figure 1). This constitutes empirical evidence of his internalization and use of intra-empowerment mechanisms, which was facilitated by the work developed in his ZPD (Vygotsky, 1934/1962). Thus, a change was observed in his ways of acting and reacting in class. There was greater engagement in the tasks and in accessing school achievement.



Figure 1. Building a robot (left) and final product (right)

When asked about what he enjoyed the most in the course, he mentioned the collaborative project works carried out in Environmental Education, showing the desire to return to that time. His account illuminated how well he felt by then and

how that time was important to him: “I enjoyed... the group work... I really liked working with the puppets [one of the collaborative project works] (...) I’d like to repeat it all again, go back to that time!” (I3, Ernesto).

As recommended by Favilli, César, and Oliveras (2003), we sought to create space for the expression and recognition of African cultures, very close to this student’s childhood and teenage experiences. At the start of the 2nd year of the course, in a task inspired by projective techniques (TIPT) that Ernesto carried out, the presence of a strong connection to the African cultures was clear, for he associated science with an African landscape, where various cultural elements are visible (animals, plants, landscapes, stars) (see Figure 2). As he would mention later on, this drawing represents the African jungle at night.



Figure 2. Ernesto’s TIPT: The instruction was “Draw or write down what science is to you”

In another task, he told a rather original story involving an alligator. When asked about the origin of the story, he said:

I must have been about 15 (...) It was an old man, at night, telling stories... He told the children this story, and I was also listening and I heard that story like that. And I remembered that story... (...) The adults started telling stories... Each one would tell the story he knew and that’s how I heard that story. (I1fu, Ernesto).

This excerpt shows his confidence in valuing a specific, important aspect of one of the cultures in which he participated. It illuminates the importance of using intercultural practices in school activities. Ernesto’s growing legitimate participation in the different communities (social, school, class) allowed him to overcome his learning difficulties, initially mentioned by his teachers: “Ernesto was a tough case (...) it was hard to work with him in the sense that he took a long time (...) at the start I had to explain many times (...). So it was a challenge” (I1, English teacher, 1st

year). His teachers underlined Ernesto's learning difficulties and the lengthy time it took for learning to take place. Teachers' remarks illustrate how different rhythms are from one student to the next and how these shape their life trajectories of participation (César, 2013a).

Two students from that class stressed the importance of Ernesto's socio-cognitive development in his school performances: "Ernesto had... I think he had good results because he, his life changed a lot after he finished the course" (I3, Daniela) and "Ernesto was better than when I first met him, right? He already had more knowledge, more grounds! He was much better" (I3, Alzira). Daniela's claim that Ernesto's life changed a lot illustrates how practices have impacts on one's life trajectory of participation.

The follow up we carried out, starting one year after the conclusion of the course, illuminates how inter- and intra-empowerment mechanisms continued to develop and to shape this young man's life trajectory of participation. This illustrates the transitions between different contexts that he is already able to do. When asked about suggestions for a future course with an alternative curriculum, Ernesto replied: "More English. English and Portuguese. They're the subjects I found the hardest. [I'd put in more] Portuguese, Maths, and English" (I1*fu*, Ernesto). He also thought that the school should diversify its educational offer: "I'd do it differently. I'd do another type of course. Instead of technical librarian (...) lab assistant. Something different would be included. So it's not always the same thing, Miss" (I1*fu*, Ernesto). This student also felt it was preferable for the course to have two vocational areas: "Two technical areas are better!" (I1*fu*, Ernesto). These accounts illuminate the mobilization of intra-empowerment mechanisms, as Ernesto showed he was capable of reflecting upon his experiences as a student and of presenting proposals. These mechanisms are also present in the management of his life trajectory of participation and of the choices this bears. During the first year of follow up, he began a professional training course in accounting and management, in which he experienced school achievement.

In 2004/2005 he decided to enrol in recurrent secondary school (10th grade). Because classes began in September, he stopped going to the accounting and management course. In the second follow up interview, we wanted to know how he had adapted, and he told us: "I felt, I felt a little different. (...) I did, but it was more with the teachers. With my classmates, I got on well with my classmates..." (I2*fu*, Ernesto). This account illuminates two vital points: (1) his gains from a socio-cognitive and emotional viewpoint, for in this class Ernesto no longer kept away from his classmates, as he did at the start of the 3rd cycle; and (2) the essential role played by emotional aspects as an inseparable component of the learning processes, particularly the role played by the affectivity established (or not) between the various participants in educational activities. This finding was also stressed in other studies (César, 2009, 2013a, 2013b; César & Santos, 2006).

In this second interview of the follow up, Ernesto was the only student who seemed to have some knowledge about the changes foreseen for the educational system, for he declared: "They talked about education and from 2005 onwards education's going to change. Compulsory education will be up to the 12th grade. I read that in the papers and also watched it on the news" (I2*fu*, Ernesto). This topic continues to be present in Ernesto's life trajectory of participation, even after

his dropout from recurrent secondary school. In this interview, he seemed quite downcast. This illuminates his constant struggle for a better quality life, something that characterizes his life trajectory of participation, inside and outside of school. César (2009, 2013a) also mentions this struggle with regard to another student who participated in vulnerable minority cultures that were socially undervalued. When Ernesto was asked about the existence of certain changes in his life, he stated: “I’d like to be better off. To be better, if my residency is issued, you know? I’d like to get my driver’s license, I couldn’t do the [theoretical] exam because my visa wasn’t valid” (I2fu, Ernesto).

As for professional projects, Ernesto mentioned he continued to look for information: “I see loads of courses in the newspaper” (I2fu, Ernesto). During this interview he illuminated a change regarding his future projects: “I’d like to say it’s like this: I would definitely like to go to school. I want to see if I can go back to school and see if I finish the 12th grade. So I can do my hosting [hotel management] course” (I2fu, Ernesto). As this was the first time he did not mention computers, we tried to expand his explanation: “Yes, yes. So I can speak languages” (I2fu, Ernesto). This change in his professional plans may have to do with contacts he established and with losing interest in computers, lacking the incentive to develop abilities and competences that are not necessary in his daily life, an incentive that is vital in adult education (Perret-Clermont & Perret, 2006).

In the third interview of the follow up, Ernesto was happier, for his legal situation in Portugal had already been worked out. This was a long and rocky process, and it also illuminates the internalization of various intra-empowerment mechanisms, which helped him not to give up, even when he had to start the whole thing over again. He enthusiastically revealed the desire to continue studying: “Yes, yes, I want to carry on. I want to see if I get my driver’s license to see if I go back to school. (...) I’ve already done the theoretical part. (...) I’ve just started the driving part” (I3fu, Ernesto). Ernesto is very pleased to be getting prepared to get his driver’s license. He also stated: “My projects for the future are going back to school and doing what I want but... but to say the truth I still don’t know what I want to do. Whether I want to do computers. I also want to take a course in restaurants” (I3fu, Ernesto). We sought to understand where this interest came from, so we asked him if he liked to cook, and he replied: “I’m really crazy about it. I really enjoy cooking. I like the whole thing of hotel management. But also (...) to do the course in computer engineering. I liked the course I did and would like to go on” (I3fu, Ernesto).

Ernesto got a fresh boost with the legalization of his situation, but he revealed some disorientation regarding his professional development. His references to hotel management and restaurants seem to arise as a result of certain personal interests, contacts with friends and information he gathered about the job market. The course he said he’d already done and that got him thinking about continuing his studies in the computer domain was a course in accounting and management. It included a computer component, which he succeeded in.

Ernesto was aware of the difficulties of the job market and, when the third follow up interview was carried out, he had not yet managed to find a job other than in construction sites. But some progress could be found in his professional situation. As he told us, in an informal conversation, he already had a working contract for 40 hours per week, that is, full-time. He still wanted to go further professionally, so he

wanted to get higher-level qualifications in a quicker way, as he expressed when he declared: “Of the experiences I want, I’m going to want to go back to school. But if I could enrol with the schooling that I have. I’d like to see if I can, get into university, but I’ve realized that to get into university I’ve got to finish the 12th grade. But if I could find a way of getting in” (I3fu, Ernesto).

We later learned, during the 4th-year follow up interview, in 2006/2007, that, in March 2007, Ernesto obtained his driver’s license for light vehicles and, in 2007/2008, for heavy vehicles. Later, in 2012, Ernesto became unemployed because the company he worked for went broke, a frequent situation in the economic crisis Portugal is facing. However, the mobilization of intra-empowerment mechanisms helped him find a solution: in July 2013, he emigrated to London, where he is studying English, working, and living with his girlfriend.

Final remarks

The case of Ernesto illustrates how an educational community can elaborate and put into practice an innovative curriculum that facilitates (adult) students’ access to school achievement and school and professional inclusion, thus countering life trajectories of participation marked by poverty and exclusion. Such trajectories are visible, for instance, in school underachievement (César, 2009, 2013a, 2013b) and in socio-professional exclusion. Access to school achievement and to socio-professional inclusion is enhanced by the development of regulatory dynamics (César, 2013b) that facilitate mutual recognition, allowing students to express their voices (Bakhtin, 1929/1981), especially those who are often excluded and silenced. In a world that is increasingly multicultural, learning to live with the others is one of — if not the greatest — challenges of education (Delors et al., 1996). The ease shown by Ernesto in the informal talks and in the follow up interviews, as well as the emotional bonds he still has with several of the participants in this alternative curriculum, make us believe that he will develop a life trajectory of participation in which he will continue to fight for his socio-professional inclusion and for a career that satisfies him.

Collaborative work is prone to intensifying social interactions, the starting point for the development of inter-empowerment mechanisms (César, 2013a), particularly in the school context. These mechanisms are then internalized, giving rise to intra-empowerment mechanisms that also shape the life trajectory of participation (César, 2013a). From a past of repeated school and professional underachievement and exclusion, and from being clearly excluded at school and in society, Ernesto now reveals a positive general and academic self-esteem, more developed complex cognitive abilities, broader socialization competences. These achievements show that he can mobilize intra-empowerment mechanisms. That is why the socio-cognitive and emotional gains that we observed while he participated the alternative curriculum, and were clear in his own accounts and in those of his peers and teachers, tend to be observed throughout in his future participations (Courel & César, 2012), that is, during the follow up. This aspect is an essential feature of an alternative, innovative, inclusive and emancipatory curriculum (Freire, 1921/1985). It is part of a school that contributes to the inclusion and to the empowerment of those participating in it.

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