A political analysis of the discourse on environmental education in the Basic Education curriculum

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Abstract: In this work, we bet on the notion of the discursive practices of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, to highlight certain meanings that the environmental education (EE) assumes in the school context. The aim of this article was to analyze an episode referring to the definition of EE within the curriculum from the process of production and hegemonization of environmental discourses in a basic education school. The data collection was based on the selection of excerpts from the teachers' debates around EE, analyzed in the light of discourse theory. The results of the analyses indicate that the school appears as a space in which there is the continuation of the process of political production of the curriculum and presents the atmosphere of debates, arguments and articulations of common interests that reveals the fundamentally discursive process of the meaning of EE and the possible paths in dispute for its inclusion in the curricular structure.

Keywords: Environmental Education. Curriculum. Discourse Theory.

Un análisis político del discurso sobre la educación ambiental en el currículo de Educación Básica

Resumen: En este trabajo, apostamos por la noción de prácticas discursivas de Ernesto Laclau y Chantal Mouffe, para resaltar ciertos significados que la educación ambiental (EA) asume en el contexto escolar. El objetivo de este artículo fue analizar un episodio referido a la definición de EA dentro del currículo a partir del proceso de producción y hegemonización de los discursos ambientales en una escuela de educación básica. La recolección de datos se basó en la selección de extractos de los debates de los docentes en torno a THE, analizados a la luz de la teoría del discurso. Los resultados de los análisis indican que la escuela aparece como un espacio en el que existe la continuación del proceso de producción política del currículo y presenta el ambiente de debates, argumentos y articulaciones de intereses comunes que revela el proceso fundamentalmente discursivo de significado de THE y los posibles caminos en disputa para su inclusión en la estructura curricular.


Uma análise política do discurso sobre a educação ambiental no currículo da Educação Básica

Resumo: Neste trabalho, apostamos na noção de práticas discursivas de Ernesto Laclau e Chantal Mouffe para evidenciar certos significados que a Educação Ambiental (EA) assume no contexto escolar. O objetivo do artigo foi analisar um episódio referente à definição da EA no âmbito do currículo a partir do processo de produção e hegemonização de discursos ambientais em uma escola da educação.
básica. A coleta dos dados se deu pela seleção de trechos dos debates de professores em torno da EA, analisados à luz da Teoria do Discurso. Os resultados das análises apontam que a escola figura como espaço em que há a continuação do processo de produção política do currículo, assim como apresenta a atmosfera de debates, argumentação e articulações de interesses comuns que revelam o processo fundamentalmente discursivo de significação da EA, além dos possíveis caminhos em disputa para sua inclusão na estrutura curricular.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação Ambiental. Currículo. Teoria do Discurso.

1 Introduction

Environmental Education (EA) has counted with more than forty years of debates in the Brazilian context, and the framework of its institutionalization itself arose in the late 1990s, with the promulgation of Federal Law 9,795/99 that instituted the National Environmental Education Policy. While a social practice and educational sphere of the environmental field (CARVALHO, 2008), did not stop producing and articulating multiple and distinct meanings around the significant environmental education, not always explicit for the subjects involved in educational practices.

There are still many attempts to grasp the meanings of discursive articulations in the environmental field and this has been the subject of research in the area (GONZALEZ-GAUDIANO and BUENFIL-BURGOS, 2009, NAVARRO, 2005). Authors such as Sauvé (1997), Sato (2001) and Morales (2009) focused on this theme and synthesized conceptions of the environment in their relations with educational strategies and objectives, expressing the great diversity of convergent and divergent discourses that make up the sphere of EE.

Kawasaki and Carvalho (2009), when presenting the dossier *Trends of research in environmental education* under their coordination, emphasize the multiplicity of meanings and discursive marks that their matrices leave in the history of Brazilian EE:

The emphasis on the naturalistic approach, which many discourses and practices more directly linked to the areas of natural sciences still reinforce today, was the one that left deeper marks in the practices of school EE. The instrumental character of educational practices, a legacy of the environmental field, associated with traditional pedagogical trends within the school, took the form of a normative EE, summarizing a set of rules of what should or should not be done in relation to the environment. In any case, in one way or another, the strong presence of educational practices always considered “innovative”, both in formal educational spaces and in formal and non-formal spaces, is a brand of the Area of EE in Brazil (KAWASAKI and CARVALHO, 2009).

In a study in 2011, Layrargues and Lima organized a matrix that distinguishes
three main strands that articulate discourses of the environment and education: conservationist, which highlights the preservation of the natural environment; pragmatic, which guides individual behavioral changes through techniques; and criticism, which problematizes social and environmental conflicts in the search for environmental justice.

In fact, when entering the educational field, environmental discourses enter circulation and are in line with pedagogical discourses constituting educational practices that aim to produce effects on subjects and society. We are faced with what has been called the process of environmentalisation of the social spheres and, particularly, of the educational sphere (CARVALHO, 2008; LEITE LOPES, 2006).

The articulation between the environmental and the pedagogical is typical of the process of the education and school environmentalisation. (OAK; FARIAS; PEREIRA, 2011) take the path of problematizing EE as a social practice and recognize it in the midst of the antinormative and critical attitude of a civilizing project in crisis, and in the establishment of new norms founded on the horizon of a new social project "Eco Civilizing". The authors recognize in this approach that there is tension, but also recognize that ambivalence has been a factor of legitimization of EE discourses in different social spheres.

We know how much these two horizons — the formative and the normative — are interchangeable in practical action, as well as in the formation of ethical and aesthetic tastes and preferences in the cultural sphere. In other words, more than a tension, it is perceived that there is a process of mutual support between the formation of an ecological habitus and the processes of ecological subjectivation (school, media, militants and government), which articulate normative and moralizing discourses. Thus, pedagogical practices associated with the processes of environmentalisation of social spheres seem to be important operators of social legitimacy, belief and cultural identity. Environmental concern, as a value claimed in these practices, brings with it the intention of expanding as an argument or valid language of moral, ethical and aesthetic orientation for the whole of society (CARVALHO; FARIAS; PEREIRA, 2011, p. 39).

Records such as these serve to situate EE by means of a social practice that articulates pedagogical discourses and processes of ecological subjectivation in the formation of the ecological subject. In the horizon of EE, the formation and standardization of behaviors and feelings are part of the same pedagogy, which is, above all, moral, because it seeks to produce effects in the ways individuals and groups conduct themselves or should conduct themselves.
But if these are general records that serve as support in a comprehensive reflection on EE in the contemporary society, we seek to constitute a more focused look at the paths of AE in school and, in particular, to the curriculum that is the space where circulating pedagogical-environmental views seek to become hegemonic based on agreements and strategies of persuasion to affect everyday school decisions.

In fact, the curriculum is not confined to policy texts or pedagogical intentions, before that, the curriculum that expresses something that is changeable and alive. Its production takes place both in contexts external to the school, as well as within the school dynamics with the participation of education departments, teachers, managers, pedagogical coordinators, employees, students, parents and even other external agents. The notion of curriculum that we trigger in this work considers the cyclical movement of the production of educational policies, which includes different contexts, spheres and social actors. The school is not a space for curriculum implementation, but rather a co-producer of the curriculum as a political, social and cultural project (BALL; Maguire, Maguire, BRAUN, 2015).

When the EE is included in the curricular decisions of a given school context, managers, coordinators, teachers, students, families mobilize texts and circulate discourses on environment and education forming webs of meanings that act in the microcontexts of curriculum policy production (FARIAS FILHO, 2020).

Educational and curricular policy documents, materials produced by education departments, textbooks, academic papers, in addition to the immense universe of information provided by the media, are also triggered in the composition of the school curriculum. In this composition, being the curriculum text and discourse, its definition happens through disputes and epistemological, ontological and didactic-pedagogical interpretations. The curricular definitions about what and how to teach EE in school is a process that, once initiated in a context of educational policy production, will unfold into pedagogical actions totally dependent on the context of practice, that is, the school floor.

In this sense, to deal with our research problem — the curricular definition of EE in school — we seek to approach studies based on the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, especially studies that address the curriculum in this perspective (GIACAGLIA, 2006, MENDONÇA, 2009, GONZÁLEZ-GAUDIANO and BUENFIL-
BURGOS, 2009, OLIVEIRA and LOPES, 2011, OLIVEIRA, G., OLIVEIRA, A. and MESQUITA, 2013, FERREIRA, 2011, GOMES, 2016). This theoretical contribution helps us to understand discourse as a social practice and struggle for hegemonies and the curriculum as a cultural policy that guides the achievement of consensus, even if provisionally.

We argue that concepts such as discursive practice, antagonisms, articulation, empty signifier, nodal points and hegemony, constitute relevant reference concepts to analyze the process of production and hegemonization of environmental discourses in broader contexts, but also in the microcontexts of the school. This bias dialogues with research in the field of curriculum production (GONZÁLEZ-GAUDIANO and BUENFIL-BURGOS, 2009, OLIVEIRA and LOPES, 2011) and has the potential to elucidate the productive nature of EE in school, precisely by bringing to light the discursive practices that mobilize the actions of educational agents in their struggles for meaning.

In this article, which is a modified clipping of a completed doctoral research, we present the analysis of an episode referring to the definition of EE within the curriculum of a primary education school. The limitations of this work are already given by the chosen sphere itself, a meeting of teachers located in the context of practice, specifically in the microcontext of the Pedagogical Political Project (PPP) text production. The potentialities, in turn, we hope will appear in the exercise of seeking a microsphere of the context of practice with tools of a political discourse analysis.

2 Notes on political discourse analysis

Ernesto Laclau proposes a political understanding of discursive practices within the field of social sciences that innovates this perspective situated in Latin American thought. The context in which his theory emerges are the last decades of the twentieth century, a period marked by the crises of the Welfare State, the emergence of new social movements, the decline of the traditional working class, the end of the Fordist system of production and the emergence of post-industrial capitalism (GIACAGLIA, 2014). Thus, discourse is not a stable structure, on the contrary, it is temporary and circumstantial and is always reformulating itself according to the articulations made between its elements within a discursive practice in a given context (LACLAU, 1986).

The work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, mainly in his book *Hegemony and socialist strategy*, reveals a post-structuralist and post-essentialist view whose
main exponent was Jaques Derrida who, according to Southwell (2014), advocates that no structure of meaning closes the principle of its own foundation. Thus, "if contingency and articulation are possible, it is because no discursive formation is a sutured totality, and the transformation of the elements is never complete" (LACLAU and MOUFFE, 2015, p. 180).

For Mendonça and Rodrigues (2014), commenting on Derrida, the whole structure is decentered, abandoning all reference to a center, to an absolute origin. Therefore, the hegemonic discursive formation process is promoted through articulations between elements without the existence of a final foundation.

Another point worth mentioning is the post-Marxist character assumed in his works, because it expresses some theoretical distancing from the classical thought of Karl Marx and those explained by Laclau and Mouffe.

There was a growing gap between the realities of contemporary capitalism and what Marxism could legitimately subsume in its own categories. [...] Rereading Marxist theory in the light of contemporary problems necessarily involves deconstructing the central categories of that theory. This is what was called our "post-Marxism" (LACLAU and MOUFFE, 2015, p. 34;36).

From these distancing, we can highlight three main points: the division of class society; the notion of subject; and the inability of classical Marxism to answer contemporary questions. In classical Marxism, capitalist society is divided into classes that antagonize each other and the interests of individuals who constitute a certain class appear as homogeneous or at least amenable to homogenization. The subject, in this perspective, would occupy only one position within a class, which would sustain corporatism within the working class. Differently, the particular demands of social groups in modernity are not restricted to the economy or are inherent in the class to which individuals and groups belong. Thus, unity in modern society is not centered on social classes – which no longer hold the role of structural places in an objective system – but in social groups with collective wills and diverse interests that are hegemonized through precarious and contingent discursive articulations (LACLAU and MOUFFE, 2015).

In this sense, the discourse is not only given by the referential materiality of the subjects and objects, but these are established within their relations and discursive articulations, because, when removed from any discursive context, they do not have
to "be"; they only have "existence" (LACLAU and MOUFFE, 2015). There is at this point an approximation with the ideas of Martin Heidegger and his Dasein — Being there — to demonstrate that the position of the subject depends on the context in which he is in a certain space-time and the articulations that become possible in this context (MENDONÇA and RODRIGUES, 2014). Another focal point is the stigmatized and essentialist position of the subject defended by classical Marxism. The scenario of globalization that we live in calls into question such a position. Due to the intercommunication between different peoples and regions of the planet promoted by the capitalist logic of free market, multiculturalism and international social relations, it is almost impossible to keep the modern subject stuck to a unique class identity.

The Discourse Theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe presents key concepts such as empty signifier, contingent and precarious articulation, and hegemony. These concepts are the basis for understanding the processes of hegemony of discourses that guide social practices. The epistemological roots that influenced the construction of these concepts are mainly found in the works of Heidegger, Lacan and Gramsci.

Let's start with the concept of an empty signifier. The process of hegemony of a discourse takes place within a set of relations called articulatory discursive practices. The social here is formed by groups that present different particular demands, which are called elements. Each element tends to want to represent others to become an articulator of collective interests in the fight against a common enemy. When this happens, the element that wishes to become articulator will have to temporarily leave aside its particularities and constitute itself as a significant emptiness. In this sense, an empty significant" is not the deficiency of meanings, but rather, on the contrary, polysemy that disarticulates a discursive structure" (LACLAU and MOUFFE, 2015, p. 188). Consequently, an element to become, an empty significant, needs to empty itself, even provisionally, of its own interests and characteristics to try to unite the interests of other elements.

The concept of an empty signifier has its roots in Heidegger’s concept of Abgrund, which states that there is no foundation, an essence that is the origin of an articulating element (LOPES; VANDENBERGHE; ARAUJO, 2015). Its function is to articulate different discourses to configure itself as a discourse representative of the
other ones (GOMES, 2016). This concept also is based on the idea of Lacan’s object A, which goes against the vision of a world without fissures (LOPES, MENDONÇA, 2015), to formulate its notion of contingent and precarious articulation. In according to Lopes, Vandenberghe and Araujo (2015), to formulate its notion of contingent and precarious articulation. According to Lopes, Vandenberghe and Araujo (2015), object A served as the basis for understanding that articulatory relationships within a discursive practice are not watertight and perennial, quite the opposite, they are temporarily universalized to represent elements within discursive practice.

On the other hand, another important concept of discourse theory is hegemony. The classical concept of hegemony made it similar to the idea of absolute domination that could be concentrated in the hands of a person or a social group permanently. It was from the notion of historical block in Gramsci that the Laclauian concept of hegemony emerged as a search for a temporary representation from the relations between social elements that are articulated within a chain of equivalence (LACLAU and MOUFFE, 2015). For Gramsci, hegemony is a political process in which a social group that wishes to become hegemonic must articulate itself with antagonistic social elements seeking to somehow represent them (LOPES, VANDENBERGHE and ARAUJO, 2015).

Accordingly, hegemony is a process of reconciliation between different demands and not a realm of imposed forces. Gramsci frees, in a way, the hegemony of a particular sphere, arguing that it does not belong to a particular class of the State, but to the whole society. However, the hegemonic struggle is still within a classist conception brought by Marxism, where agents are limited by the capitalist structure, leaving class analysis intact (PESSOA, 2014). It is precisely at this point that the concept of Laclauian hegemony differs from Gramsci's hegemonic class.

[... ] it is clear that we move away from two key aspects of Gramsci’s thought: a) his insistence that the subjects are necessarily constituted in the plane of the fundamental classes; and b) its postulate that, with the exception of interregnums consisting of organic crises, all social formation is structured around a single hegemonic center (LACLAU and MOUFFE, 2015, p.217).

From Gramsci’s contributions, Laclau formulated the concept of hegemony that is not tied to a classist system, but can be applied to the whole society without cultural, geographical and economic barriers (PESSOA, 2014).
The concept of hegemony refers to the ability of a demand to demonstrate to question a set of other demands, in such a way that they recognize themselves as part of it. It is about universalization of the private. [...] To the extent that a particular demand is able to assume the representation of a set of other equally particular demands and without leaving that particular demand, it starts to speak/act on behalf of this set, we are faced with a hegemony. (BURITY, 2014, p.71-72).

The concept of hegemony is formed in the midst of an antagonistic exterior that is limiting and constituting at the same time of the hegemonic discourse. With the notion of antagonism, we trigger the understanding that social groups have opposing interests, but also need to unite to obtain greater representativeness in the relations of knowledge and power. Therefore, discourse is a grouping of interconnected elements from a set of relationships between antagonistic political projects.

But how can antagonistic interests articulate to form a hegemonic discourse? Is it possible for opposing discourses to articulate themselves in the creation of a new discourse more representative for the majority? According to Ferreira (2011), a discourse can represent several different demands in the search for hegemony, renouncing some particular demands that are contrary to other discourses to join the latter and form a chain of equivalence.

Ferreira (2011) explains the microprocesses of formation of discursive hegemony in the chain of equivalence. In articulatory practices, each particular demand of antagonistic discourses configures as an element that can be understood as a disconnected element. Hence, the discourse that intends to become hegemonic acts as a significant emptiness and, thus, finds among these elements particular demands that are able to articulate themselves provisionally to its structure (elements/moments) through *nodal points* that come to be components that chain the different demands.

Therefore, in the articulations in discursive practice, the differences of latent elements/moments persist to form a contingent and temporary hegemonic discourse, capable of representing the other discourses that serve as allies and establish relations of knowledge and power. In this sense, discourse is always inserted within a political game of incorporation and withdrawal of meanings driven by games of interests (FERREIRA, 2011).

This reflection opens space for us to highlight another concept: displacement.
According to Ferreira (2011), displacements are situations that create a deconstructing and happen when a discourse can no longer be immune to the rebuttals that arise. The mooring elements are loosened and can incorporate new elements to configure the lost sense, which will continue to be contingent and temporary. In view of this, we can perceive that the discourses are constantly changing in the search for a hegemony, always fighting conflicting struggles to remain as representatives of the other. In this research, we corroborate Ferreira (2011) understanding discourse as an ephemeral articulatory practice and amenable to change, as a set provisionally articulated and identically intended to resize when another element overlaps hegemonically.

It is from this perspective that we take the Discourse of The EE as a significant emptiness and a nodal point following in the footsteps of González-Gaudiano and Buenfil-Burgos (2009). The EE encompasses a wide arc of discourses and takes on different meanings depending on the significant set from which the statements and claims are made. The plurality referred to here, exists in several relations, of antagonism, each fighting for its own method of environmental policy hegemony; solidarity with each other, because they eventually articulate the defense of a common cause; and in many cases are indifferent to each other. But it is precisely because it operates as a significant void, the authors show, that environmental and EE discourse can temporarily establish as an empty nodal and significant point.

In this sense, given the insoluble tension between several opposing and disputed environmental trends, we recognize that this condition of EE can mean a productive tool for the field of educational reflection. The problem is thus presented by González-Gaudiano and Buenfil-Burgos (2009):

 [...] It is often the case that most environmental educators do not examine the ideological discourses underlying the educational projects they are putting into practice and, as a consequence, their daily work is governed by political inconsistency and immediacy. In general, two non-exclusively approaches still prevail: one focused on conservation education (ecologism/biocentrism) and one on scientific education (technocentrism/anthropocentrism). The former avoids the social components of the problem and can adopt extreme and radical postures related to conservation at any cost (e.g., Deep Ecology). The latter mainly emphasizes the technical solution of the problem, in addition to also ignoring or reducing the social component and the contents are generally organized in a school form, even for non-formal education projects. A constitutive bias shows an environmental education with little capacity to contribute to the complex challenge of environmental deterioration and have its intrinsic social and political dimensions articulated (GONZÁLEZ-GAUDIANO and BUENFIL-BURGOS, 2009, p.101).
Consequently, in the line of argument set out, it seems pertinent to examine the discourses that constitute curricular projects of EE as part of a broader process of understanding the socio-environmental reality and developing educational postures compatible with the greatness of the problem that we have before us. In the present work, we will use some of the ideas presented as support in an analytical path of a concrete situation experienced with a group of basic education teachers while elaborating a curricular project involving EE.

3 Methodological and ethical path in research

The description and analysis presented here discusses an episode that occurred in the production process of the 2019 Political Pedagogical Project (PPP) of a basic education school located in the state of Pernambuco, Brazil. The process involving the construction of the PPP required several meetings and debates between teachers and even a continuing education course. The context of analysis was a meeting of teachers organized to elaborate the topic called Curricular Structure of PPP. Six (6) teachers working in early childhood education and in elementary teaching and the first author of this work participated in the meeting.

It is worth explaining the relationship of the first author with the analyzed event. In addition to being a researcher in the data collection phase for his doctoral work at the time, he is also a teacher of basic education in the same region and accepted the invitation of the school management to assist the group of teachers in the preparation of the PPP. Thus, he was participating in the continuing education course, in addition to collaborating with other moments of the textual structuring of the document.

This researcher-participant relationship stems from the commitment that the academy needs to establish with the school when this is its research field. The demands of the school did not directly influence the preparation of the research, which maintained its focus of interest and initially predicted references. His role in the meeting was to guide the other participants on the reactional structure of the PPP and the requirements of the state education policy regarding the insertion of themes of The EA, Ethnic-Racial Relations and Human Rights Education in the school PPP. With the consent of the school and the participants, the meeting addressed in this work was videotaped and the dialogues were transcribed to become analysis material.

The episode under analysis consisted of the selection of excerpts from the
dialogue between the teachers during the meeting. For us, this is not the center of curriculum production, since we consider a cyclical perspective of the curriculum, in which various contexts, spheres and agents act productively in the search for hegemony (OLIVEIRA and LOPES, 2011). However, inside the school, we can watch the continued production of curricular policies through the political microprocesses that occur at various moments in the dynamics of the institution, driven by disputes of world views and conceptions of these educational actors (FARIAS FILHO, 2020). In this sense, our context of analysis consists of one of the microcontexts of practice — that of the production of texts — where meanings are mobilized and confronted to dispute the definition of the curriculum.

For the analyses, we elaborated three criteria to guide the reading and political analysis of the discourse: 1) recognition of elements of the EE discourses present in the teachers’ dialogue; 2) identification of the formation of elements-moments and emergence of the empty signifier; 3) possible meaning precariously fixed around a significant one in dispute.

We emphasize that this research followed the guidelines present in the National Health Council Resolution 510 of April 7, 2016, which provides for the standards applicable to research in Human and Social Sciences whose methodological procedures involve the use of data directly obtained from the participants. This is a research that aims at the theoretical deepening of situations that emerged spontaneously and circumstantially in professional practice and do not reveal data that can identify the research subjects (Art. 1, Resolution 510/2016).

Regarding the ethical precautions of the research, we stated that all participants received clarifications about the research, type, justification, objectives, methodology and means of dissemination, and authorized their participation in the study. Individual explicit consent was given before the start of data collection procedures. To present the results, in order to maintain confidentiality regarding the identity of the school and those involved in the research, we do not refer to the location of the school unit and assign fictitious names to teachers.

4 Environmental education in the curricular structure of the pedagogical political project: an episode under analysis

As mentioned in the previous section, the scenario of the episode under analysis
was a meeting for the elaboration of the Curricular Structure of the PPP of a school of early childhood and an elementary school. In addition to elaborating the programs of each curricular component, that is, the disciplines by area of knowledge, the group of teachers of the school was faced with the challenge of inserting a novelty that year, the theme Environmental Education, Ethnic-Racial Relations and Human Rights Education in the format of interdisciplinary projects.

In this section, we present and discuss selected excerpts of the dialogues among the teachers, the speech subjects. We will not make considerations about the Political Pedagogical Project as in the studies of Soares and Frenedozo (2019), or about its historical, social and political nature, the complexity of achievement and risks of ideologization (CARIA, 2011), because such approaches require other modes of research. We will try here to exercise, based on the reference already presented and making the necessary adaptations, a theoretical-methodological path that focuses on pedagogical discourses on the insertion of EE and other themes in the curricular structure of the school project.

4.1 The elements of discursive practice: different ways of organising teaching work

The elements to which we refer are discourses of a distinct nature that are not articulated with each other. In the meeting under analysis, the way in which the EE can come to make up the curriculum – projects or discipline – appears as an object of discussion. Let’s look at the following excerpt from the teachers’ conversation

**Rute** — I think through projects. [...] Because we could work EE on a school-only project that could align with each type of class. [...] because in the form of design it becomes more dynamic than working separately in each room in a different way.

**Ana** — I also agree that we work in this line of projects, first because we as teachers we still have this self-indulgence of not working with projects.

**Ester** — I was seeing here in the textbook that I’m going to work, some topics that talk about this environmental and nutritional issue and interconnected with health, family and social life, human rights education. [...] The science book already comes with some elaborate themes for us to work with.

**Débora** — It can be a project that will pull these themes of Food Education and EE with others.

**Sara** — I think it could be a topic just including others all year round. In the theme Food Education here it has been drawing several other subthemes such as EE.

**Maria** — But with one project? And why not work on more projects? [...] Then we could do a project on food education, elaborated and have time, because a project has to have time. Was the project finished? Was there a climax? Was it photographed, recorded? Then we move on to work on another project. We could work as we saw in the formation of the issue of
consumerism. Work with environmental education, we have to work consumerism because since childhood school students have to learn that we cannot discard everything.

Analyzing the above excerpt, we noticed that the dialogue of the teachers gravitates around two modes of action (elements): that of interdisciplinary projects and that of the discipline of sciences through the textbook. Although the pedagogical discourse of the interdisciplinary project received the agreement of most teachers, there are particular demands in their statements about the format and period of execution that need to be articulated to form convergences.

About the defense of the project different meanings were triggered such as: a single common work project that meets the specificities of each class and discipline (Rute); dislocating teachers through project work (Ana); a project that will support food education, environmental education and other themes (Débora); a unique year-round project (Sara); a sequence of short projects (Maria). Taking a divergent position, Esther brings to the collective appreciation the opportunity she finds in the Science textbook.

Traditionally this debate has been updated in different contexts of the production of policies, educational practices and academic production. With regard to the sphere of EE, since its origins we have followed a great effort of educators to advance an interdisciplinary understanding in the construction of an environmental rationality, which generated in the pedagogical plan a relationship of struggle with the school disciplines space. Despite the advances, most of the time, the school Sciences discipline is triggered as a curricular space of EE, either by historical and epistemological affinities or for ontological reasons as shown by the studies of Jeovanio-Silva, V., Jeovanio-Silva, A. and Cardoso (2018).

The movement of articulation of the elements and the different demands raised is addressed below.

4.2 Elements-moments: first articulations around the idea of the project

The convergence of discourses, when possible, produces nodal points that are articulating components of common demands (FERREIRA, 2011). The discourse of the interdisciplinary project tends to become a nodal point when it is meant as an opportunity to resolve, even provisionally, the tension produced between different conceptions as to the way of working in the teachers’ debate: "it can be a project that pulls these issues of Food Education and EE with others" (Débora); "in the issue Food
Education it has pulled several other sub-issues such as EE" (Sara).

The issue of Food Education is therefore an issue with the potential to bring together the other issues of environmental education, ethnic-racial relations and human rights education. Analyzing documents of national educational policy Moura, Leite and Bezerra (2022) state that Food and Nutrition Education (EAN) is a transdisciplinary, intersectoral and multi-professional field, requiring continuous pedagogical actions in favor of behavioral changes in the daily lives of individuals and groups. These authors emphasize that it is essential to shift from a biomedical vision that has not been successful for decades in Brazil, to a perspective beyond disciplines. Building a possibility of transversalisation of EE, in this case, it is associated with the notion of project, since it can, in the debate established, form a chain of equivalence between the demands under discussion.

In addition, the teachers also express their demands due to time: "[...] a project requires time. [...] and to have the maturity to accept the opinion of other people, to write, put into practice, then evaluate" (Ana); "[...] what could be done is we work on this project and then, when we do the culmination, we would make an evaluation" (Débora); "[...] we have to determine how long we will work on that project. [...] work the food education project within two months and then we will have the culmination (Maria).

The significant time is configured in the analysis as a nodal point that agglutinates meanings of the contingency of work in the school, forming relationships among other issues very specific to the teaching work with projects, such as: writing skill, experience and evaluation. It is worth focusing on a few more excerpts of the dialogue that explore the relationships between these signifiers:

**Ana** — Maybe with the passage of time that we develop this ability to work on the issue of project writing and we can do it in a shorter time. At first, we will get worked up, will be angry with the others, because there will be disagreements.

**Rute** — I think that because of the lack of experience, because we are not adapted to work with projects, it would be more indicated that we work with separate issues. And we would see the first experience would be in working with projects and then, as Débora said, from the issue worked, we would see what would be next. I think that way works better than we do a single one per year.

**Débora** — Since we do not have the maturity to do this type of work, in the annual project we may get lost. It could be initially biannual, to see how we do, or bimonthly, it would be shorter

**Ana** — When we do short projects, we have time to evaluate. I think this idea of us starting a year with a project and experiencing it all year round is very valid, but for us to do this we have
to have great maturity.

Maria — We would now take the second semester and we can see the possibility, according to what happens in the second semester, we already start thinking about the third and then for the fourth semester because we will have time to elaborate.

The teaching work has long resented the limitations posed by the temporal factor. So much so that skills considered fundamental for learning and teaching, such as writing, are devoid of school space and teacher training in most cases. Here, the project depends on this skill, as well as the need for dialogue to overcome "disagreements". As already considered by Ilma Passos Alencastro Veiga:

To change the quality of pedagogical work, it is necessary for the school to reform its time, establishing periods of study and reflection of teams of educators strengthening the school as an instance of continuing education. It takes time for educators to deepen their knowledge about students and what they are learning. It takes time to monitor and evaluate the political-pedagogical project in action. It takes time for students to organize and create their spaces beyond the classroom (VEIGA, 2002).

In turn, experience is associated with the control of processes and results in the temporal contingency of the school. In Ana's words: "I think it's very valid that we start a year with a project and experience it all year round, but for us to do this we have to have great maturity". The defense of an annual project made by Sara needs to be answered because it diverges from the trend expressed by other demands: "lack of time", "lack of maturity", "lack of experience". It should be noted that, even approving the idea of an annual project, Professor Ana leaves latent her defense to produce a meaning encompassing the set of positions. In fact, during articulations in discursive practice, particular demands tend to become latent to form, in time, the contingent and temporary hegemonic discourse that is capable of representing the collectivity.

Corroborating the alternative for a short-term project, another convergence associated with time was the evaluation: "then we will outline whether we will jump to another theme, if we succeeded, or if there is something that we have to redo still in that theme (Ana). " And from this evaluation we would see: "what theme fits? What was raised in this project? Because from this project we can raise a number of possibilities from what we developed so that we realize that another issue can be worked on" (Débora).

In fact, the theme of evaluation is complex and has been very expensive to the educational field. Tomazello and Ferreira (2001) deal with the complexity of evaluating
EE projects because the results cannot always be associated with the activities developed. In their studies, Polegatti, Camargo and Savioli (2020) argue that the evaluation process in schools should be planned in line with the planning of teaching and learning processes, considering factors such as content, assessment instruments and cognitive development of students. In the case under analysis, it is verified that teachers consider that evaluating is an indispensable part for working with projects. In fact, the actions of evaluating pedagogical projects are the basis for: a) perceiving the advances and limitations of the execution of the projects and; b) defining new directions, themes and strategies to continue working with projects in the school.

4.3 The contingent and temporary hegemony of the project discourse

The notion of project was elaborated as a pedagogical discourse that operates as an empty significant, since it aggregates different visions and meanings that are provisionally articulated. The articulations were formed in the midst of discursive interactions between the teachers agglutinating nodal points around their interdisciplinary potentialities and the lack of time to plan long-term (annual) projects.

The analysis allowed us to understand that the processes of hegemonization of pedagogical discourses occurred through debates and alliances between teachers with common didactic-pedagogical views and conceptions, excluding or neutralizing divergent views. In the debates, the teachers expressed specific conceptions and demands of the teaching work at school, associating their challenge of inserting the issues Environmental Education, Ethnic-Racial Relations and Human Rights Education in the curricular structure to work in projects and seeking to overcome the limitations given by the work conditions and culture of the school.

Most participants (Rute, Débora, Maria and Ana) argued and also made concessions for the integration of the Triad Environmental Education, Ethnic-Racial Relations and Human Rights Education to be associated with food education through bimonthly projects, supporting the impossibility of developing an annual project or, on the contrary, to go back to the disciplinary work of the textbook.

According to Laclau and Mouffe (2015), discursive hegemony occurs in the midst of negotiations and discursive articulations generating precarious and contingent collective wills. Thus, through strategies of argumentation and persuasion, teachers defended their views during collective discussions and a pedagogical-environmental
discourse about short-term thematic projects was hegemonized by the support of most participants.

Finally, we highlight the presence of discourses antagonistic to the work with thematic projects. Second Ball (1994), in school there are political microprocesses that involve power relations influenced by the diversity of objectives, ideological disagreements, conflicts, agreements and games of interests that differ in each institution. The discourse that has become hegemonic is always liable to be questioned. The pressures can undo the current discursive hegemony when the discourse can no longer be immune to the rebuttals that arise, and can at any moment have its articulations undone (LACLAU and MOUFFE, 2015).

5 Final Considerations

When we place the object of the research within a given school institution, we reduce the context of practice to a place of concrete objective and subjective relationships. The potential of an analytical perspective like this is precisely to allow to enter into microcontexts of the production of the curriculum and to render political processes at the micro level that constitute institutional and pedagogical practice. The challenge, on the other hand, is to extrapolate its local insertion and broaden the horizons of the analysis to perceive its links with the outside and the broader context in which it is located.

The struggle for the interpretative hegemony of pedagogical and environmental meanings is a process that occurs both at the macro level of society and at the micro level of institutions. In the present work, a school is individualized and taken as context of practice (BOWE; BALL and GOLD, 1992) to illustrate the space of political discussion that happened during the deliberation of the curricular structure of a school’s political pedagogical project. The participants, teachers of early childhood education and elementary school, built their position within the pedagogical discourse of work by projects and it was in this register that the negotiation was established for a short-term project around the interdisciplinary issue Food and Nutrition Education.

In fact, the insertion of the EE in the school curriculum through thematic projects is an institutionalized pedagogical-environmental discourse and is already included in CNE/CP Resolution No. 2 of June 15, 2012 and in the corresponding Opinion, no. 14/2012, which establish the National Curriculum Guidelines for Environmental
Education (DCNEA). In this document, as well as in the National Environmental Education Policy (PNEA) established by Federal Law 9,795/1999, environmental education is conceptualized as "the processes by which the individual and the collectivity build knowledge, skills, attitudes and social values, aimed at the conservation of the environment, good for the common use of the people, essential to the healthy quality of life and its sustainability" (BRAZIL, 2012).

The Opinion CNE/CP 14/2012 orients that the systems and institutions of basic educational teaching assume commitments with the EE in the construction of Political-Pedagogical Projects (PPP) and a curricular approach that, among other principles, includes:

- emphasize nature as a source of life and relate the environmental dimension to social justice, human rights, health, work, consumption, ethnic, racial, gender plurality, and confronting racism and all forms of discrimination and social injustice;
- integrated and transversal, inter, multi and transdisciplinary, continuous and permanent in all areas of knowledge, curricular components and school and academic activities;
- the constitution of educational institutions as sustainable educational spaces, integrating curricular proposal, democratic management, buildings, making them references of socio-environmental sustainability. (BRAZIL, 2012, p. 18)

In the macro context of educational policies, EE reaffirms principles of curricular integration, but, in the concrete case under analysis, this integration is partial and expressed in a deliberation that clearly sizes the EE and other transversal issues in the face of the conditions present in the school’s daily life. We follow in the debates the argument of lack of time, one of the main conditioning and nodal-point, which was associated with difficulties with writing, inexperience with the execution and the evaluation of thematic interdisciplinary projects.

In addition, we observed that despite the meetings for curricular deliberations initially count on the participation of twelve teachers, not all expressed their opinions, but were adhering to the decisions established by a leadership group formed by six teachers whose dialogues we analyzed previously. Here we have another relevant aspect of the discussion, which relates the elaboration of the PPP to democratic management and its relations with the environment.

Indeed, in the society project guided by social and environmental principles,
education and curriculum must share the values of democracy, justice and co-
responsibility of school communities and surrounding populations. There is no
possibility of building sustainable educational spaces alone or apart from the broader
contexts in which they are inserted. The curriculum, in this perspective, is a space of
political, cultural and, finally, socio-environmental production.

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